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J A N E T ' S H O M E .



J A N E T ' S H O M E.

IN TWO VOLUMES,

VOL. II.

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JANET'S HOME.

CHAPTER I.

“ Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough, thou know’st thy estimate.
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing,
My bonds in thee are all determinate.”

SHAKESPEARE.

SUNDAY morning brought me a very welcome letter from my mother, the contents of which relieved my mind of its most painful perplexity. My mother’s thoughts were turning homewards. Some chance word in my last letter (I really had not intended to say anything to make her uneasy) had made her suspect that we were no longer happy at Broadlands, and, with such a thought in her mind, she could not have a moment’s peace till we were all safe at home again. She was now, she told me, quite determined not to be detained against her will any longer. Rosamond was really well enough to do without

her, and Hilary had promised to arrange to travel home with her, so she should not have the pain of leaving him behind. In less than a week she thought we might hope to meet. Hilary could not leave Morfa till next Thursday, but, if we pleased, we might join them in London on that day. The letter ended with warm expressions of delight at the thought of our speedy reunion. I should have shared her joy, if I could have hoped that Nesta would like the thought of returning home as well as I did. Not quite knowing how the news would affect her, I slipped the letter in my pocket when I had finished reading it, determined to wait for a quiet time to read and discuss it with her.

Quiet times—or at least opportunities of being alone—were not easily obtained by guests at Deepdale, and on Sunday least of all days. From the breakfast-table we hurried to the Sunday-school; from school to church; from church to visit some old people in the village; then came an early dinner; and the greater part of the afternoon was passed in the school, where Nesta and I were set to teach a shy group of country children, who appeared to find our way of talking as difficult to understand as we did theirs.

"Never mind their not understanding you," Miss Moorsom said to Nesta when she apologized for not having been able to persuade her scholars to do anything but laugh when she spoke to them; "Never mind, they will soon get used to you. I will put you into the way. Of course we did not expect that you would teach all at once as well as I do."

"Thank you," said Nesta. "But, you know, I shall not be here next Sunday. I was only sorry that one afternoon had been spent so unprofitably."

"Ah, I forgot. Well, we shall see," answered Miss Moorsom, looking round at her brother, who, having dismissed his class of boys, was approaching our end of the room to know how we had got on, and to hope earnestly that we were not tired.

When we returned home from the school there was an hour's breathing-time before the early tea which preceded evening church. It appeared to be the family habit to spend this hour in pacing up and down the garden. For one or two turns Nesta and I contrived to keep together, but we were out-maneuvred before long. Lady Moorsom called Miss Moorsom to come into the house and help her to prepare some medicine for a sick child, and Sir John provokingly took the same moment to insist that I

should go with him to the kitchen-garden. He should like to show me how well his fruit-trees looked, and to tell me something about his management of them, which I might write to Hilary. He did not ask little Miss Nesta to come too, because he did not give her credit for having any interest in gardening. Sorely against my inclination, I was obliged to follow him, and leave Nesta to make the best she could of her *tête-à-tête*.

Sir John kept me lingering about the kitchen-garden, showing me one wonderful proof of the fertility of its soil after another, for some time after the bell rang for tea. When at last we entered the drawing-room, we found Miss Moorsom pouring out the tea, and Mr. Moorsom standing by her, wearing, I perceived at once, an alarmed and penitent expression on his face. Lady Moorsom and Nesta were both missing, and, in answer to my inquiries, I learned from Miss Moorsom that her mother had thought Nesta looking rather tired and feverish when she came in from her walk, and that she had taken her up stairs to give her a globule of arnica, which she thought would be better for her than tea.

Lady Moorsom met me just as I was leaving the room to seek Nesta, and begged me to stay and take

my tea. The medicine she had given Nesta would do more good if she remained alone for half an hour after swallowing it.

She had too much faith in her remedy to trouble herself further about a patient who had taken it; but the other members of the family could not say enough about their regret and anxiety. Sir John, I thought, said a little too much. "He had flattered himself," he observed, "that Miss Nesta would have condescended to make tea for him that Sunday evening. It would have been a pretty sight to have seen her sitting at the head of the table making tea;" and then I thought a confusion came in his tenses, and I tried not to hear a sentence which seemed to imply that making tea at the head of the table would be Nesta's natural employment on future Sunday evenings.

I seized the first opportunity to make my escape from the drawing-room, and hastened to our room. There I found Nesta pacing up and down with quick, impatient steps, her hands clasped close together, and a burning flush on her face. She did not stop walking when I entered.

"My darling Nesta, what is the matter? Lady Moorsom said you were tired. Why do you make yourself worse by walking up and down?"

"Let me walk, Janet; I can think best when I am walking, and I want to think. I can't tell you what has troubled me before church-time, because one of us must go to church, and if you know what I know, you will not be able."

"Yes, I shall. I dare say I shall not think it so bad as you do."

"You will, for it is very bad. Oh, Janet, we ought never to have come here. There has been a terrible mistake! Oh, how did it happen? I wonder whether *everybody* at Broadlands knows?—Charlie and everybody? I must walk about as quick as I can; I dare not begin to wonder about *that*!"

"Now, Nesta, do have pity on me, and tell me what you mean. Is it something Mr. Moorsom said to you in the garden that has put you into this state of mind?—if so, I think you are making too much of it. We have nothing to blame ourselves for. You are not responsible for his feelings, though you may be sorry for them."

"*His* feelings! Oh, I suppose there is that too—I ought to be sorry about that too. But, oh, Jenny! I am so selfish—I am only thinking about myself, and about how my coming here must have looked to people at Broadlands. It was not precisely about his own

feelings that Mr. Moorsom spoke in the garden, it was about a letter he wrote to Lady Helen before we came here, which he thinks I have seen and approved of. She has let *him* think so—perhaps she will let every one think so. Oh, how can she be so cruel to me! But there, they are coming for you—I hear Miss Moorsom's step on the stairs. Don't let her come in! Please, dear Janet, contrive that I shall be left alone for a time."

"Well, then, promise not to walk yourself to death before I come back," I said. And as Miss Moorsom's hand was by that time on the door-handle, I was obliged to run away, leaving a kiss on poor Nesta's burning cheek.

It was a relief to find that I was really late for church. One detachment of our party had started some time ago, and Miss Moorsom was too intent on catching them up to be disposed to question me.

I hoped that our hurried walk and our lateness would account satisfactorily for the disturbed looks which I knew I brought with me into the quiet church. I sat down, and stood up, and tried to command my attention, but the service seemed to go on round me in a dream. I perceived that Mr. Moorsom was making the same efforts to attend, and with

about the same amount of success. His sister would certainly have given a black look to any child in her class who had been guilty of so many changes of position during the sermon as he was.

When the service ended, and we all left the church, I found myself consigned to Mr. Moorsom's company during the walk home, while the rest of the party adjourned to the Rectory, according to established custom on Sunday evenings.

Mr. Moorsom said we would walk round by the field-path because it was the quietest. Then I knew that I was to be taken into confidence, and that I should have the whole mystery of Nesta's trouble explained before I reached the house. Shyness got the better of curiosity, from the moment we turned into the solitary fields, and I wished heartily that the walk was well over. For a time we paced on in ominous silence.

Mr. Moorsom was the first to speak. "I see you too are angry with me," he said, "and I am not surprised; you have a right to be. You must let me justify myself."

"No, pray don't," I said, eagerly. "I do not know that I have any right to be angry."

"Yes, you have. You think I have said some-

thing to pain your sister, and thinking that, you ought to be very angry. It would be quite unpardonable in me to say a word to trouble her while she is a guest in my father's house ; I would not knowingly trouble her at any time. I would hold my tongue for ever rather than give her a moment's pain. You don't believe me—you don't understand how miserable I am, or you would say something to comfort me. Tell me, perhaps, that she is not so very bitterly angry, or show me how to make peace with her."

"Nay," I answered, "you are very unreasonable. What can I say when I don't know the cause of either your trouble or Nesta's ? "

"She *is* troubled, then?—I *have* annoyed her? Well, I must hold my tongue ; I cannot make you understand how miserable the thought makes me."

"Perhaps you had better tell me what you have said ; then I may understand."

"But you must not be angry. I must interest you on my side—I must, indeed. I will begin by acknowledging that I was wrong ; I ought not to have spoken, I ought to have waited. But I was so anxious to make your sister understand how grateful we all are for her kindness in coming here. I

wanted her to know how thoroughly my father and mother had shared my anxiety, and how they had rejoiced with me when they heard, that after reading my letter to Lady Helen, you and your sister saw no reason for depriving us of the pleasure of your visit here."

"But we did not read your letter to Lady Helen," I said. "We neither of us ever heard or read a word that was in it. Oh, Mr. Moorsom, I am so sorry and ashamed."

The colour left his face, and for two or three minutes we stood still, silent. "Then I must indeed have seemed presumptuous," he said, drawing a long breath, and walking on. I have been deceiving myself; my three days' happiness has been only a dream; but, Miss Scott, I cannot have heard you rightly. Lady Helen cannot have behaved so deceitfully to us all! She told you something about my letter—she made you understand that your accepting this invitation was to be a sign favourable to my hopes—she hinted it at least? You knew why we were all so anxious about your coming?"

I shook my head. "I would not deceive you for the world. I am very sorry, but we did not know."

"And if your sister had known? No, don't

answer in a hurry. Don't say she would not have come. If I had received such an answer from Lady Helen, it would have been a bitter pain; but I should have accepted it without a word. Now, after these three days, after I have permitted myself to hope, I cannot give up so easily. You must give me some encouragement for the future. I have felt all along that it must be a work of time. How could I look at your sister and think anything else? If I served for her fourteen years, I should not expect her to love me at the end as I love her. Why should she? but my great love might win some return. I dare say you are laughing at me. I can only say what I feel in commonplace words, that don't half express it; but, indeed, they are true words."

"I am sure they are," I answered; "and I am very sorry—"

"I wish you would not say that you are sorry. It sounds like telling me not to hope."

"But I must speak the truth. I must undo the false impression Lady Helen has given you."

"Well, you have undone it. I quite understand that I must not hope from anything that has passed but there is all the future. Cannot you help me? Cannot you advise me?"

“I am afraid I must advise you to forget us as soon as we are gone back to London.”

“That I shall never do. You don’t know me. I loved your sister the first moment I saw her. I felt she was the one in all the world to me. I shall not change. I had rather be miserable and love her than cease to love her, thinking her the best.”

“Well, you must settle that with yourself. I can only promise always to speak the truth to you whenever you talk to me. Even if I were capable of trying to influence Nesta, I am sure you would not wish me to do it.”

“I don’t know—and yet I do know, that I would not wish for anything but *her* greatest possible happiness. I honestly think that I could value her better than any one else: that is the excuse I make to myself for persevering in trying to win her. I could give her up to one who loved her better than I, if such a one *could* be; but the thought of her not being valued enough is so terrible.”

“But why should you think of such a thing?” I cried. “When she has her father and mother and brothers and myself to value her, surely we, who have known her all her life, can do that as

well as you, who had not seen her three months ago?"

"No, I don't think you can do it quite as well; but you don't understand me. I was not comparing myself with you. I was fearing—I don't want to embarrass and perplex you more than you are already perplexed, but love is quick-sighted, and I have sometimes feared—"

"You must not embarrass and perplex me, indeed," I interrupted. "I am quite troubled enough with my own thoughts without your inventing fresh fears for me."

"Well, I beg your pardon. What right have I now to advise or interfere? I will only ask one thing more. You will not let this unhappy explanation shorten your visit at Deepdale?"

"We always intended to leave Deepdale on Monday," I answered.

"To return to Broadlands?"

"Yes, till Thursday, when I hope we shall go home."

"Could you not stay here till Thursday?"

"Hardly, I think."

"You cannot imagine what a relief it would be to me, if you would; though I hope you know how

careful I would be not to trouble you. Your sister should not even guess the depth of my disappointment."

"I cannot see that it would be right for us to stay. Please let us walk a little more quickly. I am anxious to get back to Nesta, and tired too. Your father and mother will be home first—we have walked so slowly."

"We are close to the house. This gate leads into the garden. I will wish you good night here, for I see you want to get rid of me. Tell my mother I am gone for a walk, and that I shall not be in at prayer-time."

He opened the gate for me, shook hands, and strode away across the fields in the already deepening twilight. I ran through the garden, hoping to reach the house, and shut myself up in Nesta's room, before the rest of the party returned. I was disappointed. Miss Moorsom, still in walking apparel, met me in the hall, and took me by force into the library with her, shutting the door behind us with an air of mystery.

"Come, now, don't run away from me," she began; "I do think *I* have as good a right to hear as any one. There is no one in the world loves Richard

as I do ; and now that all seems settled I don't mind telling you how much I helped. At first there were difficulties—papa and mamma are always prejudiced against Lady Helen's friends. If I had not praised your sister so much they might never have approved, and Richard would never have chosen any one they did not cordially like. Of course your sister deserves to be praised, but it was, all the same, generous in me to be as ready as I was to take to her. It is not so easy to give up being first with one's brother. You will find that out when your favourite brother falls in love."

"I don't know how to thank you all enough for your kindness," I began, falteringly.

"Ah, that's right ! I am so glad. You and I must make common cause. I suppose at the bottom of our hearts we shall both feel rather doleful ; you will lose your sister, and—how odd it is ! how little we thought, to be sure, that day when we all grumbled so at having to call on Lady Helen Carr, that we were going to see Richard's wife !"

"My dear Miss Moorsom, please don't," I said, as soon as I could get in a word. "You can't think how unhappy you make me. It is most generous

in you to feel so kindly, but—but—it is not as you are imagining it to be."

"What! has not Richard asked her yet? What is all the commotion about then?"

"I wish I could tell you without giving you pain or seeming ungrateful—" I hesitated, and Miss Moorsom broke in,

"You cannot mean that he has asked her and that she has refused—refused Richard? She can't have understood him. I will just run up to her and explain; I know I shall set it all right with a word."

"Indeed, indeed!" I said, "it is I who must explain; there is no misunderstanding. You had better not go to Nesta."

"Refused Richard! She must be out of her mind—after accepting my mother's invitation, too! Why, Richard wrote to Lady Helen, and asked her not to give the invitation till she had ascertained that your sister was favourably disposed to him, and I thought it so ridiculous in him to have a doubt."

"Lady Helen never showed us your brother's letter, or we should not have come."

"You would not?—well!"

The amazed resentful expression that settled down

on Miss Moorsom's face as she pronounced the last word haunted me for several days.

"Well, of course your sister has a right to judge for herself; but, I must say, I had a better opinion of her. She should not have trifled with my brother. She ought to have made up her mind sooner. His manner has been plain enough all along. The more I think about it the more hurt and angry I am."

"We must submit to your anger," I said, mournfully; "for I think, as far as your knowledge of the circumstances goes, we deserve it. Will you ask Lady Moorsom to excuse our coming down stairs to-night? I must write to Lady Helen to ask her to send the carriage for us to-morrow. Will you see that some one takes my note to Broadlands early?"

"Yes, certainly. I will say nothing against your going early to-morrow; you will naturally wish it, and it will be best for us all."

"I think so. Good night."

I found Nesta anxiously waiting for my coming. The restless mood had passed away, but it had been followed by a fit of tears. I said all I could think of to comfort her; but, when I had been talking for some time, I discovered that my consolations were

misdirected. The trouble for which I pitied her was not the one over which she was grieving. She was not nearly so sorry for Mr. Moorsom's disappointment as I had expected to find her. If it had been in her nature to be angry she would have been angry with me for pitying him so heartily. She would not believe that he was so very unhappy ; she wished I would not talk about him. The topic which absorbed her—to which she would recur again and again, after I had talked it down—was her own pain in finding that her feelings towards Mr. Moorsom had been so misunderstood by the party at Broadlands. She would believe that Lady Helen had honestly supposed her attached to Mr. Moorsom, and yet she seemed to find the belief almost intolerable.

Finding, at last, that nothing I could say availed to soothe her, I changed the subject of our discourse by producing my mother's letter. Nesta bore the news contained in it better than I had expected, She no longer disliked the idea of leaving Norfolk ; she was ready to go home the next day, she said. She should never be happy at Broadlands again, now, never !

Through all our talk, I could not help listening curiously to the noises in the house. I heard Miss

Moorsom go up to her mother's room—and, after a long interval, the steps of the two descending the stairs, and I fancied the footfalls sounded ominous and angry. Then came the prayer bell very sharply pulled. By-and-by I heard Sir John's voice loud in conversation with his daughter as they went up to bed. Then came a long silence, broken at last by the shutting of the front door which admitted Mr. Moorsom after his evening walk. It was foolish in me, but I was glad to know that he had actually returned. I did not, myself, entertain any fear that he had gone to the shore to drown himself; but I had a conviction that the rest of the household would feel more charitably towards us when they knew that he was safe under his own roof again. About an hour after his return, when I had finished writing my note to Lady Helen, we heard steps in the passage approaching our room—two sets of footsteps—one slow and somewhat stately, the other betraying painful efforts not to be heard. They stopped at our door and Lady Moorsom entered alone. Her manner was cold, but her face showed traces of emotion.

“I have come,” she said, “to inquire how my patient is. I did not like to go to bed without

ascertaining that there was not much amiss. My dear," turning to Nesta, " how are you ?"

Nesta signed to me to answer for her, but I would not. I guessed that the person whose quick breathing I could hear outside the door, would go away more satisfied if he could be assured of her well-being by her own sweet voice.

Left to herself, Nesta made a great effort, put back her hair from her face, looked up steadily, and said that she felt perfectly well and did not want anything.

Lady Moorsom stood a minute with her candle in her hand, looking at Nesta, and Nesta looked back at her. There was a strange wistful expression in Lady Moorsom's face ; proud woman as she was, for that second or two she was humble before Nesta. For the first time in all her life, perhaps, she had seen her only son unhappy for a cause which she had no power to remedy, and for an instant she felt inferior to the person who could change his grief into joy, if she only would. If Nesta's face had shown the least relenting, if she had looked down and allowed her tear-swollen eyelids to be seen instead of her quiet eyes, I believe Lady Moorsom would have thrown her arms round her neck, and forgetting

dignity and pride—everything but her son's sorrow—she would have entreated Nesta to think better of it, and make him happy. No relenting came over Nesta's face, however, and as Lady Moorsom met her steady inquiring gaze, her own countenance hardened.

“ If you are really well and do not want anything, there is no reason why I should keep you up longer,” she said, stiffly. “ Good night.” And she turned away, shutting the door after her with an air which made me feel like an obstinately naughty child, who had refused a pardon offered by its elders, though he is longing for it all the time.

“ Well, it is, at all events, too late now for ever, Nesta,” I said.

“ Too late for what ? ” asked Nesta ; but I would not answer her, having enough to do to settle in my own thoughts whether I did or did not regret the way in which this day's events had ended. A few days before I should not have had any doubt about it ; but Mr. Moorsom had risen rapidly in my good opinion since we came to Deepdale, and his confidence that evening had quite won my sympathy to his side. His kindness to us the next morning obliged me to think better of him than ever. I don't know how we should have got over the breakfast-hour, or

borne the chill greetings to which Lady and Miss Moorsom treated us, if it had not been for his considerate efforts to reassure us, and oblige the rest of the party to treat us with due consideration. He seemed to have laid aside his usual awkwardness for the time; the deep feeling so strongly roused put all trifling embarrassments aside, and enabled him for once to express the true dignity and nobleness of his character in his outward bearing. Nobleness sounds an exaggerated word now, but I should not have felt it unsuitable that morning when I saw the expression of his face as he returned Nesta's timid morning greeting; and marked the quiet watchfulness which saved us from feeling the lack of attention shown by the ladies of the family.

In spite of all his efforts, the breakfast-hour passed uncomfortably enough. Sir John rose from the table first, and sauntered out of the room, saying that he would see us all again by-and-by. Then Mr. Moorsom got up, and, without looking at any one in particular, remarked that he had ordered his horse to come round early, for he thought of riding to Norwich that day; he did not know exactly when he should return, perhaps he might be detained from home a few days. I saw an appealing look towards his

mother at the last sentence, but her impassive countenance gave him no encouragement.

"I see no reason why you should remain from home, Richard," she said. "I should much prefer your returning to night—much prefer it."

"I am sorry to disoblige you, but I am afraid I cannot," he answered, quietly. "I shall certainly not return till to-morrow, so it must be good-bye." He walked up to his mother's chair, stooped to kiss her cheek, and whispered something in her ear. Then he shook hands with his sister, who disconcerted me by puckering up her face into an expression of doleful grief, and then plunging it into her hand-kerchief.

His farewell to me was an emphatic "Do not hurry away." "Do not suffer yourselves to be put to any inconvenience."

Nesta's turn came last. She held out her hand timidly, coldly. He held it for an instant in a speechless clasp, looking down on her half-averted face, with eyes which seemed as if they were taking their farewell of light. Then dropping it, with a half-articulated "God bless you," he left the room, and the next minute we heard the sound of his horse's feet receding down the road. Miss Moorsom rushed

to the window to look after him, as if she never expected him to come back again; and Nesta profited by the little commotion to slip unobserved from the room. I was following, when Lady Moorsom stopped me.

“ You are expecting Lady Helen Carr to call for you to-day, I understand, Miss Scott. Do you know at what time she will be here? I much fear it will not be in my power to see her.”

I was obliged to confess that I was ignorant of Lady Helen’s intentions; I had some fear that she might not send or call for us. Her health was so uncertain, I pleaded, one was afraid of depending on her.

“ And rightly afraid,” Lady Moorsom emphasized. “ Neither as a friend nor a hostess is Lady Helen a person on whom it is safe to depend. I should be sorry in any degree to imitate her conduct. I promised my son just now to tell you, that you and your sister are welcome to stay here as long as it is convenient to you to do so. If you prefer to leave us, we shall be” (with a visible effort to get out the word) “ sorry to lose you.”

I thanked her, but said I thought we had better return to Broadlands. We had only three days more to stay in Norfolk.

“And another change of air may be good for your sister. I am sorry to see her look so pale this morning. If it will be any comfort to her, you may tell her that, on further consideration, I approve of the decision she made yesterday. I think she is right to decline a position, for the responsibilities of which she feels herself unequal. It would have been a great change to her—a formidable change. I am not surprised that she should shrink from it. When she is a little older, I hope she may settle happily in her own position in life.”

I had nothing to reply, but that I was glad Lady Moorsom approved of Nesta’s conduct; and then I stood stupidly silent, longing to think of something more dignified to say, till Miss Moorsom relieved me by proposing a plan I could welcome cordially. She would be very happy to drive us to Broadlands, she said, as I was so anxious to go at once, and so much afraid Lady Helen would forget to send for us. The pony-carriage held three, and it was but a pleasant drive. If I really wished to go, there need be no difficulty about it. It was for me to decide.

Of course I decided to go. The bell was rung immediately, and the carriage ordered to be ready in two hours’ time.

I went up stairs to prepare for our departure, determined to think only of the embarrassments we were leaving, and not to suffer myself to be depressed by misgivings as to the kind of welcome we should receive when we had exchanged one offended hostess for another.

When the carriage drove to the door and we were ready to start, the whole family seemed to feel a sudden relenting towards us. Lady Moorsom came out into the hall with a little packet of medicines in one hand, and a tea-spoon full of cold water in the other, which she insisted on Nesta's swallowing, while she explained to her the contents of the papers, and entreated her to give the medicines a fair trial. They were designed to counteract the ill effects of undue agitation of mind. I wondered whether Mr. Moorsom would be required to submit to similar remedies.

Sir John, meanwhile, bustled in from the garden. "What did all this nonsense about going away in such a hurry mean? What would Richard say when he heard about it? He had intended to have had a little talk with us both. Halls were not places for private conversations, but if he had had an opportunity he might have said something. An

old man's words might have proved worth listening to. Well, well, since it distressed us, he would say no more. He could not bear to see tears in Miss Ernestine's pretty eyes. He would only shake hands, and hope we should all meet again, with better understanding of each other, before long.

Even Miss Moorsom mysteriously pointed out an upright case in the hall, and informed me that it held a very light bow, which Richard had ordered to be sent from Norwich, and which had just arrived. He had hoped, Miss Moorsom said, to teach Nesta to shoot with it, and now it must be sent back to the shop unopened. Nesta had seemed to promise so well. How Richard would have enjoyed teaching her! Well, there was no use saying more. The ponies did not like standing. Would we get in?

The leave-takings were over at last. Miss Moorsom started her ponies at a canter, and in a moment or two we lost sight of pleasant, sunny, kindly Deepdale, which I felt would always hereafter rise up before me in my day-dreams as having once been Nesta's possible home.

CHAPTER II.

“ Then in that time and place I spake to her,
Requiring, though I knew it was my own,
Yet for the pleasure that I took to hear,
Requiring at her hand the greatest gift,
A woman’s heart, the heart of her I loved.”

TENNYSON

“ No explanations, my dear Janet, no explanations. I do not want to hear any Deepdale gossip. You have paid your visit, and Lady Moorsom has sent you back safe and well. I am obliged to her, and very glad to see you, and that is all we have to say to each other on the subject. Now take off your bonnet, and we will go down stairs to luncheon.”

Thus ended the only attempt I had courage to make at remonstrating with Lady Helen for her unkindness in allowing us to accept Lady Moorsom’s invitation without explaining the conditions under which it was given.

During luncheon Lady Helen told us she had had a note from Charlie, fixing Wednesday for his return to Broadlands ; but she said nothing about Mr. Carr, and, as he did not make his appearance, I concluded that Lady Helen had gained her point, and that he had taken his departure for Morfa. In the afternoon Lady Helen went out for a drive alone, and Nesta and I wandered about the house and garden, and amused ourselves as we best could. Clouds began to gather in the sky towards evening, and a chill mist crept up from the sea. The wind, which had slept for many days, began its moan in the bell-turret on the roof, and through all the creaks and crevices of the neglected house.

“ I don’t wonder at your thinking this a desolate place when you first came here,” I observed to Nesta. “ What a contrast it is to Deepdale ! How forlorn and wretched it looks ! ”

“ It is empty to-day,” said Nesta. “ But did I really call it a forlorn place when I first came here ? How long that seems ago ! I had much rather be here, even as it looks to-day, than at Deepdale.”

Lady Helen returned from her drive chilled and shivering, and full of complaints about the sudden change in the weather. She ordered a fire to be

lighted in her boudoir, and there we assembled for an early tea, having agreed that, since there were no gentlemen in the house, we would dispense with dinner.

I thought that the evening would seem very long, but it did not. During the first hour or so Lady Helen now and then looked at her watch, and seemed to be listening for some expected sounds. As time passed on, and they did not come, her spirits rose. She grew sociable, and talked to us of her early days, telling us anecdotes of distinguished persons she had known, and describing places she had seen, and incidents that had befallen her, during her many years of foreign travel. When she was tired of talking she asked Nesta to sing, making her observe that she had caused the piano to be moved to its winter place, within the shelter of the curtain that divided her boudoir from the drawing-room. Nesta had not enjoyed the conversation as much as I had; she had been dreaming while we talked. I saw it was an effort to her to rouse herself to sing. When she had made it, however, she became so engrossed in her music, that she seemed to forget her auditors altogether. She went on playing portions that

pleased her, over and over again, in a dreamy way, as if she hardly knew what she was doing. Lady Helen thoroughly enjoyed music, and especially, she said, Nesta's music. I often thought she seemed to grow younger as she listened—I don't mean that grey hairs and wrinkles put themselves out of sight, but that the expression of her countenance changed, and for the moment, I could imagine how she had looked in the old days when my mother had thought her so charming, and when Mr. Lester had coveted her for a daughter. That night she looked almost happy, as she lay back in her chair with her eyes shut and a smile on her lips, listening, while Nesta rambled on from solemn chant to airy romance. At last Nesta began to sing a translation of a German song, of which the melancholy air and words pleased her so much, that she could not weary of repeating them, or throw her heart thoroughly enough to satisfy herself into the pathetic breathing of the words. It was something about parting. I don't remember the words exactly—it was one sentence only which Nesta dwelt upon:—

“ Parting, parting is such pain,
Parting is such bitter woe.”

Again and again—always with a new wail of pain—

the words sounded through the room. At length Lady Helen opened her eyes and interrupted the song.

“My dear Nesta,” she said, “I can’t have that again. Do you want to break my heart with imaginary woe? You must be a witch indeed, for your wail about ‘Parting, parting’ has brought tears into my eyes. Yet such a cold-hearted wretch am I, that I really do not think there is a single person in the world from whom I should feel parting *bitter woe*. Bitter woe has come to me often enough, and may come again, but not in that shape. I suppose I do not care enough *now* for any one to feel *such pain*. It is a happy thing for me!”

“But not exactly a pleasant thing for your only son to hear.” Two hands softly put the curtains aside as these words were spoken, and Mr. Carr’s face and figure appeared in the opening.

Every one started, and, under cover of the general surprise, I hoped that the vivid colour which suffused Nesta’s face would pass unobserved. Lady Helen put her hand to her head.

“Shafto, how could you startle me so? You know I can’t bear it.”

“I am very sorry; but why should my coming

startle you? May I not come home after I have been out, if I like?"

He had crossed the room now, and the light fell upon his face. I had never before seen it look so brightly content, so playfully happy.

"I did not expect you to come home to-night," Lady Helen answered. "I thought you were going to stay at the Walsingham's till the end of the week. You said so."

"Nay, *you* said so. When I left home I was in far too restless a mood to undertake to stay anywhere till the end of the week. My good genius brought me safe home to-night through the mist. If any one has a right to be startled it is I, who, coming into a dark room, not expecting to hear anything particular, found the place full of such unearthly music, that I declare I had not courage to draw the curtain, till your characteristic sentence, mother, made it clear to me that I was in no better place than my own home—to which I see you are determined *not* to welcome me."

He stood near her for a minute as if expecting an answer; then, turning round and passing me, he walked straight to the piano, where Nesta was standing.

"I had not the least hope of finding *you* here when I started to come home this misty afternoon ; yet I could not help coming."

He said no more than this, and then Nesta held out her hand and he his ; but a minute after this simple greeting Lady Helen's eyes met mine, and the conviction in our hearts was so strong that we could not help telegraphing it to each other. "It is all over," Lady Helen's eyes said ; "I have lost. Something stronger than my strong will has come in and baffled all my manœuvres." I, too, felt that something had come. From Lady Helen's despairing eyes I turned to look at the two, who still stood side by side. To Nesta I thought it was peace that had come—peace and rest. Her face expressed no embarrassment or surprise ; she had been unhappy and now she was happy ; she had felt herself lonely, and now a look had made her at one with all the world again. She had no room in her heart for any other consciousness than that. Mr. Carr's face, as he stood for a minute or two silent by Nesta's side, was less easy to read ; his lips smiled, but his brow was slightly contracted. I thought he looked like a person to whom some sudden knowledge had come, and who was occupied

in forming a resolution upon it. His thoughtful mood only lasted for that moment ; he was the first to break the silence. He drew a chair to the piano, sat down, and began to talk lightly, playfully, about his misty ride home, and the incidents of our visit to Deepdale. Most of what he said was addressed to Nesta, and she, usually so silent and shy, found no difficulty in answering him. The talk was all about nothing ; foolish chatter it seemed to me, for which I was in no mood. I had never before known either Nesta or Mr. Carr interest themselves so eagerly about trifles. Yet the tones of their voices seemed to give meaning and importance to every word they said ; and now and then a low happy laugh reached my ears, the sound of which carried me back to my childish days, it conveyed such foolish, unnecessary gladness. Meanwhile, Lady Helen lay back on her sofa, with her eyes shut, and her hand pressed upon her heart. If ever a face expressed utter heart-sickness and weariness hers did, as she lay listening to the light sentences of that unmeaning, happy talk. I, not being able thoroughly to enter into the feelings of any of my companions, stood on neutral ground, and, according to my wont, allowed my thoughts to fly to all manner of far-off speculations. I wondered

how so great a gulf could be fixed between those who sat so close together that they could hear each other breathe. So great a gulf—it looked to me like the impassable gulf that for ever divides love from hatred, happiness from misery, heaven from hell. I understood, in that moment, how voices might be heard across it, faces might be discerned beyond it; and yet how utter might be the impossibility that any could pass from one side to the other.

At length the hours wore away, and Lady Helen's penance came to an end. She made no attempt to shorten it; she stayed up rather later than usual, and made, I thought, a show of being reluctant to disturb her son's conversation with Nesta.

I understood clearly that during her long meditation she had taken her part, and that no further watchfulness of hers would stand between Nesta and her fate. I certainly wished Nesta to return home unbound by any spoken words which my father might regret that she had heard; but I very much disliked having the task thrust upon me of guarding her from them. How I wished that the next two days were over!

Tuesday was one of those misty, cold autumn days which, coming at the end of a long period of fine

weather, dispose country people to turn with zest to in-door occupations, to gather round wood-fires, and enjoy a foretaste of winter sociability. Our party was too small to separate under such circumstances, and after Lady Helen had sent down word that she should not venture to leave her room till afternoon, Nesta and I did not know how to refuse Mr. Carr's invitation to adjourn to his library, which was, he said, the only room in the draughty old house where a fire would burn brightly on a misty morning. The glowing wood fire certainly did look very inviting as we caught a glimpse of it in crossing the cold hall, and when we had once been lured into the library to feel its warmth, we were easily persuaded to take up our abode there for the morning. Nesta brought her drawing-materials, and I some skeins of coloured wools which I had undertaken to wind for Lady Helen. Mr. Carr professed to have so much work on hand that he was thankful to the rain for keeping him in-doors; but though he talked of the opportunity a wet day offered for making up arrears of work, he did not seem disposed to turn its hours to much account.

There was some time lost in clearing the end of the table nearest the fire for Nesta's drawing-board.

Mr. Carr, indeed, was willing to sweep papers and books to the floor, but my interest in them, and Nesta's respect, would not permit them to be so disposed of. Nesta gathered up the MS. pages with which the table was strewn, smoothing them out and laying them together with dexterous fingers. Now and then she asked permission to read a verse of which some word caught her attention, looking up after she had read with a glow on her cheek, and timid pleasure in her eye, to express her shy approbation. Mr. Carr soon abandoned even the pretence of employing himself, and remained, half-kneeling, on a *prie-dieu* chair, his arms crossed on the back, and his eyes following the movements of Nesta's small white hands. When the table was at last cleared, he remembered that he had promised to show her once more Comte de Gabalis's magic book, from which he had read the receipt for charming air-people. It had to be searched for, as is generally the case with professedly favourite books; and during the search the table was once more laden with treasured volumes, every one of which proved to have some special claim on Nesta's attention.

At first I gave my help in turning the books over,

but after a time, feeling that my assistance was not wanted, I turned my attention to my skeins of wool, which really must be wound before luncheon time. Pulling down long-neglected books from dusty shelves is not a good preparation for winding delicate coloured worsteds. I found that it was necessary for me to go up stairs and wash my hands. I did not hesitate to leave the room, I meant to be away so short a time; and as Comte de Gervalis's book had just turned up, I thought the reading of the charm would occupy my companions till I came back again. It fell out that I was detained some minutes longer than I expected. In searching for some cards to wind my skeins upon, I upset an inkstand, and was obliged to spend some time in wiping up the ink and putting the table in order again. As I crossed the hall, I reproached myself for having left Nesta so long alone. Might she not have felt embarrassed or troubled? I opened the door hastily, and was relieved to see that the reading of Comte de Gervalis was still going on. Nesta's head was bent down over the book, and Mr. Carr had left his old place behind her chair, and was kneeling on the ground by her side, the better to support the large volume she was reading. I came forward, and they both started, Mr. Carr

springing to his feet so hastily that the open volume fell clattering to the ground. Nesta put up her hands over her face.

“ It is only I,” I said. “ What is the matter?”

There was an awkward pause. I looked from one to the other, and the colour rushed to my face, and the words I would have spoken faltered on my lips. My eyes at last met Mr. Carr’s, and he smiled the sweet grave smile that even I could not but allow made his face almost beautiful. From me he looked at Nesta, and, kneeling down again, he put up his hand and drew hers from her face. She let him take her hand, but she moved the other so as to hide her eyes, from which large tears were slowly falling.

“ Nesta,” he said, “ how long must I wait; you have not answered me. Tell your sister—tell her what I have said to you, and I will be patient, for I know you will answer me before I go. Ernestine—Nesta, my darling!”

It was only my terribly quick ears that enabled me to catch the last words, for they were spoken as softly as possible, and the speaker’s head bent very low, till his lips touched her hand. Then he rose, passed me, and left the room. In a minute I was

kneeling in the place he had left, with my arms round Nesta.

“ Oh, Nesta, what have I done in leaving you!” I said. “ I am so sorry.”

She disengaged herself gently from my arms, and lifted her face to mine.

“ Janet—such a strange thing, you will never believe it. He says he loves me—he has asked me to be his wife.”

I did not know what to say. Seeing Nesta’s tremulously happy face before me, I *could* not be as sorry to hear this as my conscience told me I ought to be. For a moment or two, I could only tell her how natural it seemed to me that every one should love her; but my first coherent words had to be words of warning.

“ I wish he had waited to ask you till we were at home, Nesta,” I said. “ What will papa say? What will Lady Helen think of us? He ought to have waited.”

“ He says,—Nesta’s voice sank to a shy whisper—“ he says he *could* not let me go away without knowing. He was so unhappy when we went to Deepdale. He believed what Lady Helen told him

about our going. I am so sorry he thought *that*, even for three days."

"And, Nesta, what have you said? You have not promised?"

"I!—how could I? It is all so strange, I can hardly believe that it is true. Can he think me good enough? Can he be sure that it is really me—just as I am, that he loves? Perhaps he fancies I am as clever as you or Charlie."

"Nesta, darling, you must not be angry with me, but I am wondering whether papa will think him good enough for you."

"He must, when he knows him," Nesta answered, proudly.

"And Lady Helen?"

Nesta's countenance fell. "Ah, that is very sad, but—I—we will not do anything to make her angry; we will wait. Perhaps when she knows he really cares for me—and he says he does, Janet—she will mind it less."

I got up, and began to walk up and down the room. "She has behaved cruelly to us," I said, "and I cannot bear to hear you speak so humbly. She sent us out of the way for fear her son should ask you, and now, because he has spoken, we feel

like traitors. He ought not to have asked you here—I cannot forgive him for that. Oh, how I wish I had never left you this morning!"

I could not persuade Nesta cordially to join in that wish, but she readily agreed that she ought not to give Mr. Carr the answer he had asked for, as long as we remained guests in his mother's house. She was as much alive as I to the dread of doing anything which Lady Helen might reasonably consider underhand; and promised readily that she would keep close to me during the rest of our visit, and not suffer herself to be tempted to say a word that could not be said openly. We had time to talk out our first wonder and excitement, for no one came near us during the rest of the morning.

When we were summoned at last into Lady Helen's presence, I think we both felt ashamed of the deceit of appearing before her as if nothing had happened. I soon saw that we need not trouble ourselves with this scruple; Lady Helen's eyes were quick enough to read through any concealment of ours. She had only to look at Nesta's downcast face, and to observe how Mr. Carr, after one hasty glance, carefully avoided looking again, or embarrassing her with the least attention, to know what

had happened, nearly as well as if she had been in the study all the morning.

I don't know how we got through the long afternoon and evening. Every one knows how strange and unreal ordinary occupations seem, when the whole heart and mind are secretly occupied with some one absorbing thought. We all four, eat and talked and walked about as those that dream. I think that Nesta and Mr. Carr fared the best of the four, judging by their countenances; theirs was at least a happy dream. Nesta seldom spoke, but when she did, she would have been blind indeed, if she had not perceived that by one person present, every word she said was received as gratefully as if, like the princess in the fairy tale, her lips had distilled pearls. When I noticed the bright light that shone in her eyes, whenever she ventured to raise them for a moment from her work, my heart ached with anxiety for her. It was well for her to promise to be silent, but I felt it was a silence of the lips only. None the less would the words spoken that day colour all her future life. When we were alone together at night, Nesta and I sat on the old oak chest she had described to me in her first letter, and talked over the events of our visit at Broadlands, and I dis-

covered how widely different from mine had been her experience of its weeks and days and hours. One image, unconsciously to herself, had filled them all.

“Janet,” she said, when she had come to the end of her story, “it is wonderful how things grow. This morning I found the thought of his love so strange, I hardly dared to look at it. Now, do you know, it is not strange—anything else would be strange. It seems the one certain necessary thing—the whole of my life; the history I shall have to give of myself when I die.”

“Oh, Nesta,” I said, half frightened, half reproachfully, “think of what you are saying—‘the whole of your life!’”

The awe-struck tone of my voice startled her.

“Is it wrong?” she asked, consideringly—“it sounds wrong; but, Janet, I am afraid it is true. I hope God won’t be angry with me, and that if it is wrong, He will show me how to make it right.”

No fear but that He would, I thought, since Nesta asked it so earnestly; but I was such a coward, it was just that leading I dreaded for her; I feared so much that it might be along a path of pain.

The sun shone brightly the next morning, and

Lady Helen favoured us with her company at breakfast, for which I was thankful.

On leaving the breakfast-room Mr. Carr made an effort to intercept Nesta before she could reach the door; but she was too quick for him, and glided past before he had time to speak a word. I shook my head in answer to an appealing look at me, and followed more leisurely.

How would the day pass, I wondered? I really did feel some pity for his anxiety, but not too much. He ought not to have brought it upon himself.

Half an hour afterwards, when Nesta and I were trying to occupy ourselves in Lady Helen's boudoir, Mr. Carr presented himself at the door, and addressed his mother. He had come, he said, to advise Miss Scott to take a walk to the shore. He was sure Lady Helen would agree that she must not lose this last bright morning.

"Go, Janet," Lady Helen said, looking, not at her son, but at me. "You had better make the most of this last morning; it is still too damp for Nesta and me to venture out."

"Oh, I shall not think of going out," Nesta said, colouring violently.

Mr. Carr came a step further into the room, and addressed her, speaking low. "Perhaps, in the afternoon, when it is warmer, and your sister has brought back a good report of the day, you will let us persuade you to come out."

Nesta looked up to make a slight dissenting gesture, and Lady Helen, out of all patience, spoke sharply to me. "If you mean to go, Janet, you had better set off at once. I know what walking to the shore means, and I have no pleasure in being kept waiting an hour and a half for luncheon."

It was pleasant to get out of doors; the air was fresh and cool after the rain, but full of sunshine. We crossed the garden almost in silence, but as soon as we had entered the wood, and were safe from inquisitive eyes and ears, Mr. Carr turned to me with a smile which displeased me, as being too confident. "Well?"

"Well!" I answered, drily.

"Ah! I see there is a preliminary question. Is it peace?"

"What do you mean?"

"Between you and me, is it peace—peace or war? Are we to be friends?"

He held out his hand; I put mine behind me. "I

am not prepared to make any bargain yet," I said ; "I will not take sides."

He looked down at me with that lazy, graceful, considering air of his, which always gave me the impression of want of earnestness.

"Ah," he said, "you look very formidable, but you don't alarm me in the least. I know you too well; there is not a hard spot in your heart. You can't turn against us, I defy you ; no, I am not the least afraid. I was not afraid that you would prejudice your sister against me even last night, though it was rather hard to hear the murmur of your voices —her voice, low as it is, I could distinguish it in my room—and to know that my fate was being discussed, and not be able to put in a word. You will relent, and tell me something—something about her. Tell me that she did not cry last night. I thought her eyelids were swollen this morning, and I could have killed myself."

" You ought to be very angry with yourself," I answered ; "you have put her in a very painful position. You know Lady Helen will be displeased when she hears what you have done, and that it is painful to us to conceal such a thing from her. You ought not to have spoken to Nesta."

“If I had cared less for her, perhaps I should have thought of all these punctilios, and asked her at a better time; but, you see, I care so much, that when a chance of knowing her mind came, I could not resist it.”

“I beg your pardon,” I said. “If you had cared for her more, you would have been more considerate. It is not a punctilio that the person you ask to be your wife should require your mother’s approval—at least, her consent—before you expect her to promise you.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “My dear Miss Scott, that sounds very well, but we are facing facts. You know my mother. I don’t wish to say a word against her; but, knowing all you know, do you seriously advise me to take the wife who would have her approval, and lose every hope of happiness or worthiness for my whole life, by selling myself to gratify her ambition?”

“I am not advising you. I have nothing to do with your conduct, except so far as it concerns Nesta. What we are discussing now, is the impropriety of your asking her while she is a guest in your mother’s house.”

“Ah, so I thought! Come, confess that, put

into plain words, it does reduce itself into a question of time and circumstances—of the fitness of which I hold that true feeling is the best arbiter."

"I can't argue with you," I answered, losing patience, "but I do think it was very unkind. Nesta has incurred the anger of one hostess by refusing an offer; it is really too bad that she should be exposed to the danger of displeasing another by accepting one." Angry as I was, I could not help smiling, as I finished my sentence: the dilemma it depicted sounded so absurd.

Mr. Carr laughed outright. "Thank you, thank you," he cried. "I said you were not formidable, that you meant to tell me, and you have told me all I want to know. Your sister has refused Moorsom, and fears to displease my mother by accepting me. Thank you. Nay, you shall not take my thanks so coldly. I will not hear such news without being congratulated. You must shake hands."

I shook my head without speaking, between vexation at my own admission and real unhappiness, I was so troubled, that my voice failed, and the tears sprang to my eyes.

Mr. Carr was grave in an instant, and when he next spoke it was in a gentle, pleading voice.

“Shall I be such a very unwelcome brother to you?” he said,—“cannot you try to reconcile yourself to me? I don’t think I am altogether so very bad; I cannot be, or your sister would not tolerate me. Will you not trust her instinct? I do. I could put her good opinion against the misconstructions of the whole world, I am so sure *she can* only like what is worth liking.”

“My approbation is not the question,” I answered. “You seem to forget our father and mother.”

“No, I don’t; but since you are here, I want to gain yours first. You are nearest to Nesta’s heart, and therefore, next to her good opinion, I shall always hold yours—I must have it—I mean to have it; for the rest, I flatter myself I have already won your sweet mother’s liking, and your father I hope to satisfy when the right time comes. My conduct will bear looking into; and if he takes exception at some of my opinions—at some of my writings, I must answer, that I was his pupil; that he and his training have helped, with the other influences round me, to make me what I am. He cannot—he dare not—stand between me and the only chance of happiness that has ever come to me. I wish you

would tell me what your objections are—what faults you accuse me of."

"There would be no use in my doing that," I answered, half crying, half laughing; "for if I do, you will talk about them till you make them all look like virtues."

"Ah! I see how it is. You and I are too much alike ever to think very highly of each other. Being equally fond of dissecting endlessly our own thoughts and emotions, we distrust each other because we are always distrusting ourselves. Such people as you and I turn naturally to seek rest in characters like Nesta. Their single-mindedness gives us a sort of standing-ground. We bow before their faith, so much wiser than our reason, and see the light, pure and clear, through their eyes, which to us could only come broken into a thousand colours. What Nesta has been to you ought to make you understand, in a degree, what she and I might be to each other."

I put aside the flattery which insinuated that I stood on the same level as himself, and spoke out my thoughts unsparingly.

"Do you think it would satisfy any woman to have a husband who wanted her faith for a standing-ground, and the truth of her feelings to make him

sure about his own? I should expect my husband to guide me, and teach me how to think and feel."

"Of course *you* would; but Nesta's wants and yours are not the same. If she chooses me, may I not conclude that I am what she wants?—that, without my vagaries and restlessness, and doubts and sorrows, I could never have called out the depth of divine compassion and tenderness in her nature, which must be called out before her whole heart can be given."

"She has not said yet that she has chosen you."

He smiled. "No; but did I not put it doubtfully enough? I will say 'if, if' as often as you like. You cannot unsay the sentence that slipped out just now, and you must not expect me to forget it."

"Well," I answered, "if I am to be held so strictly to my words, we will speak on indifferent topics, where you will not be tempted to twist them into more meaning than they were meant to have."

"As you please. I am ready now to talk about anything. Shall we discuss the origin of evil, or free-will, or the last new novel? Any of these subjects will do equally well for what we want.

With our minds full of a totally different thought, it will be good mental exercise."

"We can be silent," I said.

So we were for a minute, and then I burst out, "You asked me to tell you some of your faults. You have reminded me just now of the one I dislike most—that half-sneering way of talking you fall into sometimes, as if you were not quite sure whether anything were of consequence—whether all feeling might not be pretence. I am sure I am not like you in the disposition that prompts you to this kind of speech."

"Say experience, instead of disposition, and you will be right," Mr. Carr answered. "It would be strange indeed if you, who have never been in the battle, should have put on the armour. Perhaps, if your life had been like mine—a constant struggle to keep safe a belief in goodness and nobleness—to keep natural feeling from being stung to death by constant arrows of sarcasm—you would not have allowed your inner self to appear so openly; you would have adopted some sort of case-armour."

"You ought to call it disguise, not armour, and disguise is only fit for weak people. Ought any grown-up man or woman to be so afraid of having

their feelings wounded, or their opinions shaken, that they dare only express them veiled in half sneers?"

He coloured. "No, certainly not. You are right. Well, in excuse for myself, I will confide to you a discovery I have just made. I never *have* been grown up till now. I begin to think that no man is full grown till he thoroughly loves—till he has found the woman he can love with his whole heart and approve with his whole mind. If he never finds her, he never grows up in this world."

"Then you mean now to cure yourself of sneering?" I said.

"I don't mean to cure myself, I mean Nesta to cure me. When you and I are walking down to this shore together some ten years hence, we shall perhaps be commenting on the success of her work. You will have to acknowledge that there is not even the capacity for a sneer left in me."

"Now we must be silent again," I cried. "You have worked the conversation round to the forbidden topic, and I have no answer to make."

It fared so with every topic started. Nesta's name was brought in somehow; and during the rest of the morning our conversation was broken by long intervals of silence, when we each followed our own

thoughts undisturbed. I remember vividly what mine were. How I wondered whether I should ever again walk across those marshlands, or gather shells on the low, flat Broadlands beach! If ever, how I should feel when I did so, and what would have happened in the interval—wondering over the possibilities of the future in the fearless way which is only possible while we are strangers to pain; and the very recollection of which brings pain, when the future over which we wondered has changed into our past.

I gathered some shells on the shore for myself and Nesta to make treasures of, little thinking how the sight of them would sting us one day.

When I got back to the house, I was glad to find that Charlie had already arrived there. He had received the note I sent to him the day before, and had hastened back to Broadlands, burning with curiosity to know the reasons which determined us to return home so suddenly.

I had never relied much on Charlie's judgment, but I found it a relief to disburden my mind of all the occurrences of the last week even to him.

Our conference occupied pleasantly my last afternoon at Broadlands, while Nesta and Lady Helen were taking a drive.

Charlie was as incredulous as brothers always are when they hear of their sisters' conquests. It required very particular statements to convince him that it was not all my fancy, and when I was provoked to enter into details a little too sentimental for repetition, he received them with shouts of laughter. Even when I succeeded in persuading him to be serious, I found him little inclined to take a bright view of Nesta's prospects. He was more sure than I had been that our father would never give his consent to an engagement between her and Shafto Carr. In support of his opinion, he repeated some strong words my father had once addressed to him on the subject of unequal marriages—words, he said, which he should never forget.

“What made him say that to you?” I asked, curiously. “Did he suspect that you were in love with any one?”

A blush passed over Charlie's handsome boyish face. “Well, if you must know, he did. Some fool or other—I wish I knew who—had put some such crotchet into his head.”

“But who was the lady he was warning you against?”

“Now, Janet, don't look as if you would drag

the name out of me with your eyes. How awfully curious you girls are! It was—some one you hardly know."

"Rosamond Lester!" I cried. "Charlie, do you know, I guessed long ago that you cared for her."

"And do you know that you guessed completely wrong? I do not, never did, and never could care a straw for her. It seems to be a prevalent delusion, that everybody is in love with Miss Lester."

"But you used to look very conscious when she was mentioned."

"Conscious? I should think so, when I had had first my father, and then Hilary thundering at me about her till I was tired to death of the sound of her name. The truth is, that when I was staying at Morfa I did try to get up a bit of a flirtation with Miss Lester, just out of opposition, to spite Hilary, and to frighten my father, who really has no business to get such ridiculous notions into his head at his age. It was no use, however. She is quite too gloomy and grand—much more in Hilary's style than mine. I should as soon think of falling in love with the Jung-frau."

"Do you mean that you think Hilary loves her?"

"He's an awful hypocrite if he does, that's all.

How I should like to prove it against him! But no, no! Hilary will never be in love with any one. He never would go up to the hall, he preferred standing shivering by the hour on a mountain-side, watching his shepherds digging lambs out of the snow. He thought it a grievance that I declined to shiver with him."

"So, after all our suspicions, neither Mr. Carr, nor you, nor any one else is in love with Rosamond."

"I think it was no business of yours to have suspicions at all on such a subject."

"Well, we will talk about our own concerns again," I said; and we discussed possible changes in the family, and speculated about the future, till the last purple tint of sunset faded from the marshlands, and the autumn twilight falling round us warned us that it was time to return to the house.

Nesta kept close to Lady Helen all the evening, venturing now and then on showing her timid marks of affection. She was not repulsed. Lady Helen endured her soft words and shy caresses with a sort of pitying tolerance, as if she saw in her a victim of whose fate she had a melancholy prescience. We were to start early in the morning. I had resolved to have some conversation with Lady Helen when we

went up stairs at night, but I found it impossible to carry out my intention. She held the door of her room, to which I followed her, while I made my farewell speech.

“Good night, my dear, good night; you have nothing to thank me for. Your visit has ended most disastrously for yourselves. I know quite well what has happened; it is a sad mistake, but you must allow I did my best to prevent it. I am as much disgusted with Shafto's folly and selfishness as your father will be. Don't worry yourself; I exonerate you from blame, and only think poor Nesta as silly as girls of her age generally are. We must hope that some extraordinary turn of good luck will yet undo the mischief. Now, good night, and good bye, my dear.”

I was thankful for Lady Helen's permission not to worry myself; it saved me from many useless scruples. The next morning Mr. Carr accompanied us to the station, and during the long drive, while Charlie was on the box of the carriage, and he sitting opposite Nesta and me inside, there was opportunity for much talk about his plans and feelings. I was not sure that it was well for Nesta to hear it, but I could not prevent her listening. He insisted on

having her directions respecting the course of conduct she wished him to follow. "Should he write to our father at once, or wait and come to London as soon as our father returned home?" He *said* he was ready to do whatever Nesta and I thought right, but he showed a very strong determination to make us think it right that he should come to London. I was in favour of the letter being written at once to our father, and I think Nesta would have shared my opinion if Mr. Carr had not been sitting opposite, urging his view of the case with all manner of eloquent pleading. "A personal interview would be so very preferable," he said. "If our father's answer were a refusal to permit his visit to us in London, he should be obliged to obey him; and yet he felt that he must plead his cause in person, and above all, he must see Nesta again, whatever happened."

For a long time Nesta sat with her eyes fixed on a bouquet of monthly roses, which Mr. Carr had gathered for her from the porch before we started, hardly ever looking up or speaking, but permitting me to answer for her. But, as we drew near to the end of our journey she gained courage, and when I expressed my opinion too strongly, put in some



palliating word, which Mr. Carr never failed to make the most of. Not, however, till the carriage stopped at the railway-station, and Charlie was in the act of getting down to open the door, was her final verdict given. "She wished to do what was most right," she said, "but, perhaps—yes—she understood; she could not ask him to write that difficult letter to our father. She had rather he did as he wished about it; she should like him to come to London"—(the last words were almost a whisper).

Was there any occasion to shake hands over it? It was too soon to wish good-bye, for we had to walk down the hill to the station, yet Mr. Carr put out his hand, and she gave him hers; and I could not but feel what that silent hand-clasp implied. Nesta did not mean to promise herself away without our father's and mother's advice—but had she not done it?

We had not time for long leave-takings. When we reached the station the train was just starting. Charlie ran about distractedly after our luggage. We took our seats, the shrill whistle sounded, and we started on our road home. Was it really only a month since I had left it?

CHAPTER III.

“ ‘ Does the road wind up-hill all the way ? ’
‘ Yes, to the very end.’
‘ Will the day’s journey take the whole long day ? ’
‘ From morn till night, my friend.’ ”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

HOME again ! Once more we four brothers and sisters were assembled together under one roof. What busy talking days were those five which followed our return home, and preceded our father’s ! I began to think I had assumed my ideal character of family-adviser, I was so much in request during that time for private conferences.

On the evening after our arrival, Nesta had hidden her face on our mother’s shoulder, and told her own story in her own fashion, and my mother had been moved to give fuller sympathy than after-reflection permitted her to think justifiable. After a night’s

consideration, she determined that it would not be right in her to encourage Nesta to think of Mr. Carr till our father knew of his offer; and, since Hilary ruled that nothing must be told to our father that could tempt him to hasten his return, she took the course of advising Nesta not to think about him for the present, and consoled herself by drawing me into corners twenty times a day to ask me in confidence what I thought Nesta was thinking about.

My mother's surprise when she heard the history of our visit was very unlike Charlie's. That Nesta should have been admired and valued seemed to her a matter of course. She would not have wondered if we had had to tell of twenty offers instead of two, but it plainly disturbed and perplexed her not a little to discover that Nesta had (as she mildly expressed it) thought of any one. That fact she could hardly bear to realize to herself. She confessed that it was a blow to her to resign so soon the heart that had been all hers; so soon to see her youngest, whom she had always shielded from trouble, burdened with the "cares of life." Nesta little knew what these cares were, or she would not be in such a hurry to take them up, my mother assured me, sighing, many times every day.

These conferences with my mother were usually cut short by Hilary's hunting me up, and insisting on my going out with him for a walk. He took great exception to our custom of staying in the house the greater part of every day. How we could exist without air, and how we could endure to spend our days cooped up between four walls, was a perpetual marvel to him. To our indifference to fresh air he was disposed to attribute every one of our family maladies, mental and bodily, from my father's failing eyesight, to Charlie's extravagant college expenses, and Nesta's infatuation in fancying herself in love with such a fellow as Shafto Carr.

My first conversation with Hilary convinced me that he was in no mood of mind to sympathize with love troubles. He used to set his face into a peculiarly hard, stony look, when I tried to enlist his sympathy on Nesta's behalf. I did not know what I was talking about, he would say; he had given me credit for more sense. Nesta engaged to Lady Helen Carr's son! We must all be out of our minds. I need not talk to him about love; perhaps he knew more about it than I did—perhaps he did not. One thing he did know—that no good could come of loving, or fancying that one loved, a

person in a different position of life from one's own. One might shut one's eyes for a time and fancy that all was well, but the pain and self-humiliation would surely come in the end. The only thing to be done in such a case, was to crush out the foolish presumptuous love at once. It was to be done, and he had no patience at all with people who made a fuss about it, or troubled their friends by bemoaning the pain it cost them.

In some such strain as this would Hilary talk to me for half an hour at a time, and when I answered that I thought he was exaggerating the difficulties, for that there was after all no great disparity between Nesta's position and Mr. Carr's, he used to turn sharp round upon me, and look for a moment as bewildered as if I had broken in upon his train of thought by introducing a totally irrelevant subject. When I ventured to remark on this pre-occupation, and begged him to tell me what he was really thinking about, and to take me into his confidence, I was accused of being fanciful, and asked angrily what business in the world I had to suppose that he had any particular meaning in what he said, or any confidence to give. After this we usually finished our walk in silence.

On the whole, I did not at that time find as much comfort in discussing the perplexed state of our home affairs with Hilary as I had hoped to do. Some trouble of his own hid other people's from him. He was too proud or too prudent to let us help him, and so, for the time, he lost the power of helping us. But I must be just to Hilary. We had one conference which I liked to remember when he had gone. I am not sure that I ought to call it a family conference, for neither Hilary nor I were the chief speakers in it. It occurred on the evening after my father and Mr. Armstrong returned to London. My father and Charlie went out after tea to attend the first history lecture, and Mr. Armstrong remained behind in our dining-room with Hilary, who was to return to Morfa the next day. I had intended to leave them alone together, but as I was going out of the room Mr. Armstrong called me back, to say that he wished, while Hilary was still with us, to repeat a conversation he had had with Dr. Allison about our father's health. A stranger might have thought it odd, that a person not a member of the family should know as much of our affairs and take as deep an interest in them as Mr. Armstrong did. To any one who knew his character it was not strange. I remember his

telling me that he seldom walked from our house to his chambers without being stopped by a poor child, with a request that he would knock at a door to which his petitioner was too small to reach, or explain a direction, or assist in an anxious search for a missing halfpenny. The children were right in selecting him from all the crowds of passers, as the subject of their appeal; there was "helper" written on his very face. If each person were to take some word to express what he was—*that* word would belong to him. While we were all talking together, it occurred to me to wonder why, after profiting for so many years by this helpfulness of his, I should only now be beginning to appreciate it. I supposed it might be because Mr. Armstrong's services were always rendered so much as a matter-of-course, and so often persisted in with playful determination in spite of remonstrance, that I had come to consider them rather as proofs of his love of having his own way, than as marks of kindness to us.

After that evening I began to understand how very much we all owed to him. The news he gave about our father was not cheering. Dr. Allison did not, indeed, despair of arresting the complaint from which our father was suffering, but the precautions

he insisted on were just those which we feared our father would be least likely to observe. He was ordered to avoid exposure to cold or great light, and to use his eyes as little as possible. How to save him from transgressing these rules many times every day, we four set ourselves to discover. After carefully considering the work he had to do in the school, Mr. Armstrong and I made some fresh arrangements, by which we could so prepare each day's business as to spare his eyes in some degree; but when we had done our utmost, we were obliged to confess to each other that there was little hope of his ever being cured, unless he could lead a very different kind of life from his present one. Mr. Armstrong told us that our father had spoken to him about his own plans for the future. He was determined not to give up the school at present, for he hoped to be able to struggle on at his post till Charlie had left college. The trustees of the school had promised to appoint Charlie as my father's successor in the head-mastership, if he took a sufficiently high degree to warrant their doing so—and my father, having great faith in Charlie's ability, looked forward hopefully to the day when his favourite son would relieve him from the

work which his growing infirmity rendered burdensome.

Hilary began to walk up and down the room while Mr. Armstrong told us this plan of our father's. After two or three silent turns he gave us his thoughts upon it.

"In less than two years Charlie will take his degree, and step at once into this important post—he will be in a position to provide for the whole family."

"He will do for us precisely what our father did for his father and mother," I said. "It is right he should have some one now to do it for him."

"Right! I should think so—what a lucky fellow Charlie is, to be able to do it! If *I* keep myself, it is about all I shall do for the next five years. I shall be of no use to them, and *I* am the eldest son. Charlie is a lucky fellow."

"Will he think himself lucky?" Mr. Armstrong asked, turning to me.

"He will be willing," I answered. "His vanity may make him think he is sacrificing himself, but he will not disappoint our father."

"I don't doubt his good feeling, but I fear the certainty that he is condemned to a profession he dislikes will damp his energy now. He will have no

heart to work well—he will be idle. I wish his next two years were safely over."

"So do I."

"Well," Hilary burst in, "if Charlie is not satisfied to do such work as our father has done all his life—if he does not think it honour enough to be the bread-winner of the whole family, all I can say is, more shame for him!"

"Would *you* have been satisfied with such a life?" I asked.

"Janet!" Hilary's eyes flashed upon me; he took a quick turn up and down the room. When he spoke there was remorsefulness mixed with the gravity of his tones. "Janet, if when I had the choice of my way of life before me, I could have hoped ever to do for our father what Charlie has the chance of doing, I should not have hesitated for a moment. Much as I hate a studious life, I would have made myself take to it."

"Very well for you to say that," Mr. Armstrong answered. "You have the power, not only to do work you dislike, but to take a kind of savage pleasure in making yourself do it. Charlie is not like you. It will be very hard to him to resign himself to the prospect of being tied down to an

occupation he hates. His sense of duty will, I hope, carry him through; but I wish the struggle had come a year or two later, when he was a little more prepared to meet it."

"Do you think it would be better not to tell him just now?" I asked. "Could you explain your fears to our father?"

"No, I don't think I could; it would be an interference on my part; and, besides, I should not like to suggest fears to your father which would give him such very great pain."

"Do you think I ought?" I asked, a little fearfully.

Mr. Armstrong smiled, and answered my question with another. "Come, now, do I deserve that? Am I such a coward, that I should be likely to put off a task upon you because I think it too painful for myself?"

"But you might have thought I was the proper person to speak."

"I don't think we are either of us called on to advise your father. Perhaps he knows Charlie better than we do."

Our conversation flagged after this. Hilary walked up and down the room in silence, and I fell into a

train of rather melancholy musing. I did not know I was looking dismal, for I did my best to keep the tears from coming into my eyes; but, I suppose, the expression of my face betrayed my thoughts to some kind eyes that were watching me.

Mr. Armstrong's voice roused me from my reverie. "You are tired and dispirited to-night, no wonder," he said, cheerfully; "but you will feel differently to-morrow."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"Because to-morrow the school meets, and you will have your hands full of work. I know your courage will rise to meet it. Hilary has been envying Charlie for the part he is to take by-and-by. Do you know I think something might be said about the part you are taking now, and have taken for the last two years; something, or a great deal, only I suppose it belongs to women to do the hardest part of the work without anybody noticing that they do it, or thanking them; they expect that sort of thing, and prefer it, don't they?"

I suppose some foolish self-pitying thought of the kind had been poisoning my mind with its bitterness, for it was wonderful how these few pleasant words seemed to set me right with myself and every

one. After hearing them I could look up, and say, frankly,

“No, no ; my work gets plenty of thanks—more than it deserves ; or, if not, never mind.”

“Never mind ! that's right. Work done with a view to appreciation and thanks is poor work, whether done by man or woman. You will want better standing-ground to bear you up under all you will have to do for the next year or so.”

“No work for papa will be difficult or hard to me.”

“It can be difficult without being hard. Let us see how we can plan it. Your father says you are never again to try *your* eyes by writing at night; so all your new work must be got into the coming short days, or left.”

“Left ?”

“Yes, for me to do.”

“No, indeed ; you do far too much for us already. You shall never have a scrap of my work. I am ashamed to think of all the trouble I have hitherto let you have.” A slight trembling in my voice warned me to stop abruptly.

Mr. Armstrong took out his watch. “Now, how long do you think you and I ought to quarrel over

this question? You know our disputes always end in my having my own way. Suppose you satisfy your conscience by thinking your objections for a quarter of an hour, and then we will resume the conversation on the supposition that I have had the best of the argument. Do you see what o'clock it is?"

"Yes; too late for us to waste a quarter of an hour. I had rather talk over the work, and satisfy you that I can get it all into my day."

I did my best, and strove hard to lengthen out the hours, and insisted upon my capacity for correcting exercises, reading themes, and working problems in incredibly short spaces of time; but with all I could say I had to yield on more points than one. When everything was arranged, I was almost ashamed to find how very little that was difficult or tedious there was left for me to do.

As I was mounting the stairs to rejoin my mother and Nesta, after Mr. Armstrong had left us, I could not help thinking what a much more valuable possession a friend was than a lover. I had lately seen two very sensible men act the latter character, and I considered that they had contrived to make themselves as embarrassing and troublesome as

possible to the person they most wished to please. What a different effect friendship had on people's behaviour to each other. How thoughtful, how wise, how kind a friend might be! Was I not fortunate in possessing one? Nesta lifted up her wistful eyes to me when I entered the drawing-room. What had I heard, she asked, to make me look so bright? Had I good news for her? Could Charlie have had a letter from Broadlands? I was ashamed of myself when I found I had no reason whatever to give for my happy looks.

Poor Nesta! those busy days were a hard trial to her: then first her eyes took the wistful look, and her face the expression of patient waiting that grew so habitual to it in after years. Our father's return, and Dr. Allison's opinion about his health, had given a new direction to every one's thoughts. Our mother, especially, was much pre-occupied with this fresh care, and could not but believe that Nesta, like herself, would give every other a second place in her mind. She begged Nesta to say nothing about our Broadlands. visit that could disturb our father, till he was thoroughly rested from his journey, and till the pain of parting from Hilary was well over. So Nesta had to take her first lesson in waiting.

CHAPTER IV.

“ And slowly was my mother brought
To yield consent to my desire ;
She wished me happy, but she thought
I might have looked a little higher.”

TENNYSON.

OUR mother's extra caution defeated its own purpose. As usually happens in such cases, the news for which our father was to be judiciously prepared came to light in the most unpropitious manner, and at the worst possible time. It was on the day when Hilary and Charlie left us. We breakfasted early, for the sake of the travellers, and after breakfast our father and Charlie retired to the den to have some private talk together. They were absent longer than we expected. Hilary grew fidgetty, and observed, many times, that Charlie would certainly miss his train. When they emerged from the study at

last, Charlie came out with a somewhat crestfallen countenance, and my father looked depressed and agitated, as he too often did after a private talk with Charlie. Both wished to have a few minutes longer together, during which some kind words might have been said to remove the painful impression of parting under a cloud. Unluckily, Hilary's fear of being late gave an air of bustle and confusion to our farewells. My mother felt and lamented it, but my father was so unhinged in consequence, that I saw he could hardly listen patiently to my mother's endless conjectures whether they would be in time for the train, and to her complaints that Hilary should have forgotten his packet of sandwiches after all.

I was glad when Mr. Armstrong arrived, to walk with my father to the school. As they were leaving the room, the servant entered with the morning letters, and my father turned back to look at them. He could no longer read writing, but he generally knew, by the outside look and feel of a letter, whether it came from any one of his accustomed correspondents. He held up these close to his eyes one by one, and, pronouncing that they were all for him, and probably about school business, said

he would put them into his pocket, and make Mr. Wilton read them to him in the course of the day. One letter fell to the ground ; Nesta stooped to pick it up, and on glancing at the direction hesitated a moment before giving it back to him.

He held out his hand for it. "Don't keep me waiting, Nesta ; I am late already."

Still Nesta hesitated, and when our father at last took the letter from her and put it into his pocket, her eyes followed it wistfully.

"What was there about that letter, Nesta ?" I asked, seeing her still look disturbed when my father and Mr. Armstrong had left the room.

"Oh, I wish I had had courage to keep it back," she said. "It might be only a fancy, but I thought the handwriting looked like Mr. Carr's. If it should be a letter from him to papa, and papa should give it to Mr. Wilton to read, Janet, how dreadful it would be!"

I tried to laugh at her fears, and during the day spent several half-hours at different times in combating them ; but my arguments did not set Nesta's mind at ease, and, towards evening, I began to share her anxiety. I knew that it would pain our father very much if such news as that letter might contain

came to him in a roundabout way; and I wished heartily that we had never made a secret of it. When it began to grow dark, I went to the study and settled myself to correct a pile of exercises there. If our father were angry or troubled, it would be to the den he would betake himself first; and I believed I could save him some hours of painful musing, by being at hand to volunteer the excuses and explanations, he was always so slow to seek. I had left the desk, and was kneeling on the floor looking out a word in the large dictionary when he came in. I had prepared myself for seeing him look angry. I was not prepared for the air of dejection with which he threw himself into his chair, for the weary sigh which seemed to come from the bottom of his heart as he lifted his eyes languidly to the light, now no longer painful to them.

“Papa!” I said, timidly.

“Is that you, Janet?”

I came and sat in my usual place on the arm of his chair. For a moment or two he remained silent, slowly moving the fingers of one hand over the others, a habit he had fallen into since his sight began to fail. Then he drew a letter from his pocket and laid it on the desk.

“Janet, that letter is from Mr. Carr. Do you know—can you guess what he writes to me?”

“Yes,” I answered; “but—”

“*You* know. Janet, I thought I might have trusted you—that you, at least, had confidence in me.”

“Papa, you must not be angry with us.”

“How can I help it, when I find that you have all combined to keep a secret from me—when I learn first from a letter, which I permit an indifferent person to read to me, that my daughter has engaged herself without my knowledge? It would have been wrong conduct to any father; it is cruel to me, for I am helpless among you all. I can only know henceforth what you please to tell me. If you take advantage of my infirmity to keep secrets from me, Janet, how shall I ever bear it?”

The dejection in his voice went to my heart. I threw my arms round my father’s neck, and burst into tears. “Oh, papa, you must not say that,” I cried. “You must not put it so. We have been to blame, but it was not want of trust in you. Do not judge us harshly.”

He let me say what I liked, and after a time, when I had been able to make my explanations clear, he

acknowledged that he had been too hasty. It was not bearing his affliction well, he said, to become suspicious so readily.

When at length we turned to the real subject of discussion, I found that I had gained a sort of advantage from the previous misunderstanding. My father had been imagining our conduct so much worse than it was, that when I told him how Nesta had really acted, he felt relieved. Perhaps my eagerness to save him pain gave a colour to my words, for when I tried to recollect them afterwards, I was surprised to find that I had been making excuses for Mr. Carr, and praising him in order to account for Nesta's liking.

When I had satisfied my father's anxiety, he gave me Mr. Carr's letter to read. It was just such a letter as, considering the line of conduct we had pursued, we might have expected would come. In it Mr. Carr announced his intention of calling on our father the next day, and expressed a rather confident hope that, since the permission Nesta had given him to speak to her father had not been recalled, he should find him disposed to receive his petition as kindly as she had already done. My father might well be startled and pained by having such a letter read aloud by a common acquaintance.

"Did Mr. Wilton read it all?" I asked.

"Yes, all. I would not let him stop. I was so sure there was some mistake, and that another word or two would bring the explanation."

"It is very unfortunate," I said. "The Wiltons are such gossips. The story of this letter will be told to all our mutual acquaintance."

That was but a small annoyance, my father said. The really important point now was to settle this matter in such a way as to promote Nesta's highest happiness and welfare. She was quite a child. Perhaps the best thing for her would be to put it out of her head once for all. Was I sure this could not be done? I was so *very* sure, that my father stopped my protestations at last.

"Ah! well, well, my dear, that will do. Of course, of course. You are young, and are only seeing the beginning of these feelings. You have never seen an end. You don't know how they may be lived through. Poor little Nesta! I would not be hard upon her. I suppose she thinks herself grown up, and capable of choosing. Her lover writes as [if he were a hundred. I can only think of him as a very clever, forward school-boy, who was always making me hope greater things from him

than he ever accomplished. That is, let me see, six—no, eight years ago. He may be very different now. He has written some rather foolish poetry, I fancy. However, I don't profess to understand modern poetry, so I must not judge him from his. You and Charlie think it all very fine, I suppose. Well, I will see him and talk to him, and if he can satisfy me that his principles are sound, and I see reason to think that he is sincerely attached, and if he can bring his mother's approbation—well, then—why, then—we must think about it. Yes, you may go and tell Nesta that *then* I will promise to think about it."

The "ifs" left a very large margin of uncertainty, greater, I feared, than my father had any idea of; but I considered his verdict so far favourable, that I was in haste to report it to my mother and Ernestine. "May I take Mr. Carr's letter away with me?" I asked.

"Certainly, if you like; it's of no use to me—I can't read it. I shall never have a private letter again, Jenny. No, don't cry, child, I shall get used to it; and for the future we will manage better, and not make our family concerns more public than they need be."

I found myself very welcome in the dining-room, where Nesta and my mother were waiting anxiously. My mother left us soon, to seek my father in the study, and then Nesta read Mr. Carr's letter by the flickering light of the street lamps, and holding it tight in her hand, forgot all the troubles of the day, and was content.

During the rest of the evening she was gay—radiantly happy—beautiful; so that my mother sometimes put down her work, and allowed her eyes to follow her with admiring wonder as she flitted about the room; and my father roused himself from his habitual reverie to smile—nay, once to laugh, as he had not laughed for months, at her playful words and ways.

The next morning Mr. Carr called, showing his remembrance of an account Nesta had once given him of our hours, by coming in time to catch our father before he left the house. He was taken into the den, and stayed there till school-time. When he left, it was with our father leaning on his arm. He had undertaken to walk with our father to the school-house, in order to prolong their conversation. I am afraid I made Nesta rather angry by remarking that I did not consider Mr. Carr so

safe a guide as the one whose place he had that day taken.

After tea, when our father had gone to the lecture, our mother repeated to us the result of his conversation with Mr. Carr. He had been pleased and satisfied on the whole. Mr. Carr had promised not to see Nesta again till his mother had written to signify her approval of his offer, but he had not seemed to feel any doubt that she would do so immediately. A great deal of talk had followed after this preliminary was settled, and my mother assured us that our father had been pleased with what he had seen of Mr. Carr, better pleased than he had expected. Nesta was made very happy by this assurance, but I could not help having a vague misgiving. I feared I knew quite well what sort of conversation it had been, and how, without intending it, Mr. Carr had given a false impression of his opinions and state of mind to our father—how they had gone on using the same phrases, without knowing that each attached somewhat different meanings to them.

Two days later, Lady Helen's letter arrived, and again I felt oppressed with a conviction that I understood its meaning and the feelings under which it had been written better than my father and mother

did. I had to read it aloud to my father, and then it was passed round the table for my mother and Nesta to look at. What a vivid colour burned on Nesta's cheek, and how wistful her eyes grew while my mother turned the sheets backwards and forwards, and re-read sentences that puzzled her, and my father sat back in his chair with slightly contracted brows, thinking. At length he drew Nesta towards him; he touched her burning cheek with his finger, and passed his hand over her face. She was trembling so, she was obliged to kneel down by his side; and she looked up at him as if it were a sentence of life or death she was expecting.

“ My child, why do you agitate yourself so ? ” he asked, gently. “ Cannot you trust me to judge what is best for your happiness in this matter ? ”

A less truthful person than Nesta would perhaps have answered “ Yes. ” She could not give such an answer, for she knew there was little trust in her heart just then, only one wild wish, which to make room for itself, had thrust every other thought aside.

She was silent for an instant, and then whispered, “ Papa, are not you satisfied with the letter ? ” He sighed and shook his head—he understood the silence and the question.

“ I suppose I ought to be satisfied,” he said; “ it is a consent. I could have wished it had been given in fewer words, and that there had been less said about the wisdom of keeping secret an engagement that is not likely soon to end in marriage. Still it is a consent, and that was all I exacted. Nesta, my child, listen to me: if your heart is really given to this man, I will not let any pride of mine stand in the way of your happiness. But listen to me. Be very sure that you love him and that he loves you, before you consent to become one of a family that has some excuse for looking down upon you. How could you, who have always been the cherished one among us, bear to live among people who would look coldly upon you?”

“ I hope they would not for long,” Nesta answered; “ and even if they did, I *could* bear it if it did not alter him—if he went on loving me.”

“ Ah, if!—but, Nesta, I ought to warn you. Pride is often stronger than love. What look like very small differences at first, may be widened till they put those who thought themselves united very far apart. It is not well when one of the two feels that he or she has given up the most. It is apt to wake a feeling of bitterness in both hearts. One estimates

too highly the advantages sacrificed, the other can never forgive itself for not having had enough to give."

My father spoke with an effort, and there was a sort of bitterness in his tone. Nesta looked up at him wonderingly.

"Papa," she said; "you cannot think this more unequal than I do. You cannot be more surprised than I am—but he *has* chosen me, and there can never be any bitterness for me in that. I shall only have to be grateful, and I shall be grateful enough."

"I think Nesta is right," my mother said, speaking for the first time, and with some hesitation. "I do not think what your father has said need make her afraid. When people really love each other, they do not look upon little seeming differences as he fancies they do. A young girl—a foolish young girl—might talk too much about a very bright happy home she had left, and seem to be making comparisons, but it would only be seeming, there would never have been any grudging in her heart. There cannot be where people really love. I don't want to influence any one, but I should not like your father to let that fear weigh with him, for I think there he has always been a little mistaken."

Nesta turned quickly round and caught my mother's hand. "Oh, mamma, you understand; speak for me," she said.

"There is no need," my father answered. "I see what your wishes are, and, as I said before, I will not let my own pride withstand them. God bless you, my child!" He put his hand solemnly on her head, and then my mother took her into her arms and kissed her, and when my turn came and Nesta put up her face to mine, I felt as if some great change had passed over her, and that it was no longer my own Nesta, but some one else's, whose tearful cheek I kissed.

Before my father left for the school, I wrote at his dictation to tell Mr. Carr that he might come to our house that evening.

I was busy with the exercises all day, and saw little of Nesta till we went up stairs before tea to change our dresses for the evening. She was very particular about what I was to wear, and would dress me first with her own hands, as if it signified most how I looked. Her own dress was soon chosen—it was one Mr. Carr had once admired at Broadlands; but her fingers trembled very much when she put up her hair—it would not go right; then I tried

to arrange it for her, but my performance was pronounced to be dreadful—it must all come down again. She had to gather up her hair hastily at last and twist it under her comb, for my father's knock came sooner than we expected, and it would not do to keep him waiting for tea. As she crossed the hall I stopped her, and stood before her to take one hasty look, to smooth the silken braids on her forehead, and leave a kiss between them. The last arrangements, hasty as they were, had been most happy. She looked prettier than I had ever seen her before—more than pretty—beautiful. There was a radiance about her eyes and face and figure that gave a new character to them. It was as if some drooping flower had raised its head, and was drinking in life and colour from the light. Mr. Carr opened the dining-room door for us. It was so strange to see him in our room, I did not wonder that the only greetings between us were silent shakes of the hand; or that the conversation during tea was subject to many pauses. After tea, my mother, Mr. Carr, and Nesta went up stairs, and my father and I adjourned to the den. I was glad all my work was done, for my father had a great deal to say to me. He was divided between a certain misgiving concerning the

wisdom of the step taken that day, and a liking for his old pupil which his two short interviews with him had revived.

He recurred with pleasure to Mr. Carr's old school triumphs. "And he has not forgotten his scholarship," my father said, complacently. "Just as you came in this evening, he was telling me that when, during his travels in the East, he visited the Troad, he thought over our old Homer readings. He thinks that the old poet's descriptions of scenery have so thoroughly entered into my mind that I know the place almost as well as if I had seen it. He was surprised, he said, to find how familiar the features of the country were to him, and he attributes his knowledge to the pains I used to take to make him realize the descriptions in the poem when he was reading them.—Ah! you are laughing, Jenny; you think your father a pedantic old fool, as easily flattered in his way, as his little daughter has been in hers, eh?"

CHAPTER V.

“ Alas ! how easily things go wrong !

• * * * *
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.”

G. MACDONALD.

YES, it was settled. Nesta was Mr. Carr's promised wife ; and Hilary and Charlie being gone, we had to settle down into the usual routine of our daily life, with the strange difference which the knowledge of that fact brought into all our thoughts and feelings. My hands were full of business during the months that followed, and I found that my work prospered best when I took myself and it to the den, where I was always secure from interruption. The dining and drawing-rooms were subject to invasions from Mr. Carr, who used to come to our house at all hours of the day, and waste Nesta's time and his own to an

extent which sometimes moved my mother to a gentle remonstrance. The great basket of needle-work, which had always been considered Nesta's special charge, no longer changed its contents with the rapidity of old times. Mr. Carr made a show of bringing his work to our house, and really, I believe, sometimes passed an hour or two in writing, but the same hours were not equally serviceable to Nesta. He liked her to be in the room while he was composing, and he liked her to be silent; but Nesta had, I found, to content herself with sitting in the window and being looked at occasionally. She must not sew—the sound of the needle was disagreeable to him, and he thought the quick motion of the fingers ungraceful; he had rather she did anything but sew, while, with the over-full work-basket on her conscience, sewing was the one thing she longed to do.

I do not suppose, however, that Nesta had any great objection to have her time thus wasted. I should have heard very little about it, I fancy, if other subjects of disquietude had not arisen as time went on. I don't know when she first descried the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which floated up into her "wide heaven of blue," but she was very

reluctant to let us know the quarter from which it rose; unwilling to confess, even to herself, that a possibility of disagreement between herself and her lover had opened itself out before her. By degrees we all discovered that Mr. Carr was more alive to the difference between our position in life and his own than we had expected he would be. Duties and employments which were quite simple to us offended and shocked his taste.

He had been used to rail against conventionalities, and to express strong admiration of the men and women who had courage to set them aside; yet, when it came to practice, he could not reconcile himself to such a little thing as Nesta's habit of going out alone in the morning to execute our mother's commissions at various shops in our neighbourhood. He made an effort at one time to accompany her in her daily rounds, but the tax on his patience and punctuality grew quite unendurable. He never could come at the right time; my mother's household arrangements would not permit her messenger to delay; Nesta constantly had to set out alone, and to meet on her return her lover's face with a shade of displeasure on it. When Mr. Carr did come in time to walk with Nesta, the shopping

seldom prospered ; the minute care in selection necessary to satisfy our mother, amazed and wearied him beyond expression. He could not conceal his dislike to her employment ; Nesta had to return home leaving half her business undone ; and I do not know whether she dreaded his coming or his not coming the most.

Before long another little cloud floated up to obscure Nesta's sunshine. My father and Shafto had agreed perfectly well at first. When my father returned from the lecture, or came up stairs with me from the study, he used at one time to enjoy half an hour's talk with Shafto. When little disagreements in opinion arose—when my father showed surprise at anything Mr. Carr advanced, or took exception to one of his favourite phrases—Shafto was willing at first to let the subject drop with some qualifying explanation, or at worst with a slight shrug, when Nesta was not near enough to keep the disdainful shoulders in their place by putting her hands upon them.

I do not know how the first argument arose, or how Nesta and I could be so much off our guard as to let it be carried on, till one subject after another was embraced by it, and a vast gulf of difference of

opinion discovered between the two who had fancied themselves, at least to some extent, in accord. I believe Nesta did her best to turn the conversation, but my father and Shafto were both far too fond of an argument to be easily stopped when once fairly embarked in one. I remember how pale Nesta grew as the talk went on, and how my father's tone, at first a little dictatorial, changed to one of grave remonstrance. Mr. Carr did not know the harm he was doing; when he rose to take leave, he said he thought we had had a very profitable evening. It was a good thing to turn one's thoughts over. He did not, for his part, profess to have fixed opinions; he preferred to be without them, but he always liked to hear other people explain and defend theirs.

My father was not so easily satisfied. When he and I were next alone together, he blamed himself bitterly for the hasty way in which he had consented to Nesta's engagement, without making himself sufficiently acquainted with the character and principles of her suitor. He could make allowances for Shafto Carr, he admitted to me, he had no wish to judge him. If he had regarded him merely as an over-confident young man, expressing crude opinions,

which further acquaintance with the real sorrow and work of the world would probably modify, he could have heard him with indulgence, and hope that he would grow wiser and humbler as years went on. Looking upon him as the person to whom he had promised to confide the care of Nesta's life, it was a very different matter—a matter for grave thought, for earnest consideration. He would not take another hasty resolution ; he would watch and wait.

Knowing how carefully he was watching, my anxiety and Nesta's whenever he and Mr. Carr fell into conversation afterwards, may be imagined. It was very weak of us ; we ought not to have wished to keep our father in ignorance of Mr. Carr's mind. We never confessed to each other or ourselves that we did ; but by a sort of instinct, we were always pushing away every serious topic when they two conversed together. The result of our interference was that a freezing constraint fell upon us, the instant our father entered the room, and that the comfort and freedom of our evenings were over for ever.

The beginning of March brought Lady Helen Carr to London, and with her another dark cloud into our sky—or rather, she acted the part of wind, and marshalled the scattered clouds into formidable battalions

against us. How dark and heavy everything used to look after one of her visits!—though, perhaps, she had been all kindness to each one of us while she stayed. It was singular, certainly, that faculty she had, of dropping a heavy burden upon one's heart with one smiling gracious word. How many cold March days I remember, when Nesta used to creep about the house, looking like a spring flower withered by the east wind, and how surely I soon learned to expect that drooping, troubled look on her face as a sequel to a note or visit from her future mother-in-law.

Yet on our first interview with Lady Helen, my father and mother were satisfied with the manner in which she referred to her son's engagement with Nesta. She did not profess to be pleased, but she was careful to speak as if Nesta were the person whose interests had been sacrificed. She did not, she said, consider a long engagement a bad thing for a young man; on the contrary, she felt she owed a debt of gratitude to the parents who showed such confidence in her son's good faith as to permit their daughter to waste the best years of her life in waiting till he was ready to claim her. It was a lucky thing for Shafto that Nesta's father

and mother were so unwilling to part with her, that the prospect of her marriage being deferred almost indefinitely did not trouble them.

My father and mother found nothing to object to in these sentiments the first, or indeed the second time they heard them ; but when the same thing came to be said over and over again, and when nothing else ever was said, we all agreed in finding it somewhat depressing.

Mr. Carr and Nesta had been accustomed to map out a very different future for themselves. It had been arranged early in the year, that Mr. Carr was to leave England in the spring. His uncle, Lord Denbigh (Lady Helen's brother), had been appointed ambassador to Constantinople, and he had offered to take Mr. Carr with him, in the capacity of private secretary, a post for which his knowledge of Eastern language, and experience in Eastern travel, peculiarly fitted him.

Till Lady Helen came to London, Mr. Carr and Nesta, in talking over this prospect, had always seemed to take it for granted that they were to be married some time in the course of that year. Mr. Carr was to accompany his uncle to Constantinople in May, but he was to return for Nesta as soon as he

had prepared some sort of a home for her. It would be in the autumn, perhaps late in the autumn, Nesta thought.

When Nesta repeated to me attractive descriptions which Shafto had given her of the kind of life she would share with him in that strange land, she only scrupled to rejoice over her prospects because she thought it would be almost wrong to be so very happy without all of us. I used to reconcile her to her happiness by planning impossibly delightful summer and winter holidays, when we were to visit her in her eastern palace, and, perhaps, under Mr. Carr's guidance, fulfil my father's early dream of travel in Scripture lands.

After such brilliant visions it was no wonder that Lady Helen's doubtful words fell very coldly on our ears. It frightened Nesta to hear herself pitied for her approaching long separation from her lover, and praised for having so readily consented to his banishment. Lady Helen *would* take it for granted that it was Nesta who had persuaded Shafto to accept his uncle's appointment, and *would* compliment her on the prudence she had displayed in so doing. After all, she *would* say, six or even eight years soon pass, and Nesta need not be afraid that they would alter

her *very* much. She was so much prettier than most people, that, like Helen of Troy, she might set the lapse of years at defiance. Ten years hence she would still be charming. No wonder she had confidence in herself.

In this strain Lady Helen would descant, for half an hour at a time, while Nesta and I were sitting with her in the boudoir of her dreary London house, never noticing how Nesta's sorrowful dejected face appealed against her words.

Silence and downcast looks were all the appeals we could make. If Mr. Carr had not courage to avow his purpose to his mother, it was not for us to do so. I grew very indignant about his silence as time went on. At length the long-deferred explanation came. One rainy April day, Mr. Carr called late and remained for more than two hours, talking in the dining-room with Nesta. Nesta came up from the interview with a very sad face. As soon as we were alone together she told me that Shafto had had a most unsatisfactory conversation with his mother. He had at last informed her of his intention of being married during the autumn. She had made no objection at first; she had professed the greatest affection for Nesta, and declared that she had now

no other wish than to see her son made happy in the way he had chosen; but while they were amicably discussing Shafto's plans for the future, she overwhelmed him by raising a wholly unlooked-for difficulty. It was not till after some further explanation that Nesta and I understood this difficulty. We had hitherto thought, and Mr. Carr had appeared himself to think, that, though far from rich, he had a small independent income. It now appeared that there had been some misunderstanding on this point. The Broadlands estate had very much decreased in value since the late Mr. Carr's death. The yearly income now derived from it did not exceed the sum which Lady Helen's husband had assigned for her use during her lifetime. Of late years, while she had lived chiefly with the Lesters, Lady Helen had received a portion only of the money due to her, leaving what remained for her son; and he, indolent and unused to investigate his affairs, had grown so accustomed to the arrangement that he had learned to consider the few hundreds a year this afforded him as justly his own. It came like a thunder-clap upon him when Lady Helen made his project of immediate marriage an excuse for hinting gently that she could no longer continue

an indulgence, which, under present circumstances, would involve herself in serious difficulties. She could not now, she told her son, spend the greater part of every year with the Lesters ; she had resolved to give up her wandering habits, and settle in some suitable home of her own ; and to do this she must claim the full income which her husband's will decreed should always be made up to her. Against this Mr. Carr could of course say nothing. Lady Helen was but claiming a right, which she had hitherto given up for his convenience.

Poor Nesta ! the spring opened sadly for her, and I do not think we pitied her quite enough. I had dreaded her leaving England, till the certainty that she was not to go came almost like a reprieve. My mother was even a little surprised and hurt that Nesta should grieve so bitterly because she was *not* to leave us all. Had it really come to that—that she was sorry to stay at home with her father and mother ? Nesta had to assure her many times every day that she was not grieving because she had to remain, only that he must go.

The thought of parting came slowly to the lovers ; they would not allow themselves to see that it was inevitable at first. Mr. Carr came every day for a

fortnight with some fresh scheme, which Nesta was to hear and decide upon. Now he would decline the secretaryship, stay in London and read for the bar ; now he did not see any reason why they should not marry at once upon the income he should receive from his uncle. True, he had no habits of economy, and had been used to spend twice as much on himself alone ; but with Nesta he was to begin a new life.

Nesta was kept from day to day in a state of feverish excitement, with always that terrible pain laid upon her, of appearing to decide. In reality she had no power of determining anything. I always knew how every plan would end. I saw that a far cleverer head than hers was bringing every circumstance to work towards a desired end. Mr. Carr, with all his talents, and in spite of an occasional burst of impetuous self-will, was precisely the sort of person to allow the course of his life to be settled for him by the pressure of circumstances, or the contrivance of others. He never saw how things were tending till it was too late to alter them. Nesta's far more practical mind was for the time overruled. Lady Helen worked upon her generosity by representing that the sacrifice of her own wishes

was necessary to her lover's future good. When Mr. Carr talked of staying in London, or marrying before he left England, Lady Helen drew Nesta aside, and whispered fears about Shafto's health. He, like herself, had never been strong ; care and anxiety destroyed him. She was sure he would never be able to bear the anxiety which a hasty, imprudent marriage must bring with it. Her own experience, the acute sufferings which mental struggles had brought on herself, made her fearful.

All Nesta's reasonableness could not defend her from being touched and troubled by this fear, and she was too humble to say or think that she could bring strength and help to her husband, which might repay him for some sacrifices. Neither did Mr. Carr say that for her. I fancy Lady Helen had secret conferences with him too, and that she dwelt on my father's distrust of his steadfastness, and on my mother's reluctance to part with Nesta, till his pride was roused, and his affection wounded.

He told me that he saw we none of us trusted him, and that he dare not ask Nesta to accept a lot which all her friends dreaded for her. If she chose it freely, it would be well ; but he would not urge it upon her.

It was the devotedness of Nesta's love which gave her strength to pronounce the verdict at last. She would let him go, she decided, since it was for his good; and alone, since it was thought possible that she might be a hindrance to him. She had rather wait, and suffer alone for years, than cloud his life for a moment.

So Nesta explained to me her reasons for deciding as she did. I don't know how far she was able to make them clear to Mr. Carr, or whether it was her reserve or his pride which prevented them from understanding each other perfectly. I saw, however, that in spite of all he had said about leaving her free to choose, her decision came upon him with a shock of surprise and disappointment. He had expected her to find it impossible to part with him, and the discovery that she was more reasonable than he had thought it in her nature to be, actually pained him. He did not remonstrate,—an open remonstrance would, perhaps, have changed all,—but he could not keep himself from dropping now and then a remark on Nesta's prudence; sometimes it was a half-sneering compliment; sometimes a tender reproach, but always so veiled, that Nesta could only shake her head sorrowfully, and remain silent under it.

When it was once settled that Mr. Carr was to go to Constantinople alone, every one but Nesta seemed to wish his last weeks away. My father and mother congratulated themselves at the end of every day, as if they really thought that when Mr. Carr had once sailed, the disturbing element would pass out of our lives, and Nesta would again be content and cheerful as she had been a year ago.

She said little, less and less as the dreaded time drew nearer. Each day in passing, made her a little paler, quieter, more silent. It was her nature to fade and shrink into herself under sorrow. She had no great demonstration to make. Grief set a seal on her lips, and on her heart; only in joy could her nature expand, and show itself.

I don't think Mr. Carr quite understood her silence and quiet. They oppressed him. He came and went, haunting our house during those last days like an unquiet ghost, appearing and disappearing unexpectedly, at all hours, as if he were always seeking something he could not find, and always going away dissatisfied.

Often I used to see him sit watching her, while she, with her eyes fixed on the ground, and her once busy hands drooping idly in her lap, remained for a long



time together, pondering in silence; and when at last she lifted up her face, and the result of her deep thought proved to be some contrivance for his comfort during the voyage, or a plan for obviating some trifling inconvenience she thought it possible he might be exposed to, a shade of disappointment used to pass over his face; his lip used to curl, not exactly with disdain, but with a kind of wondering pity, as if he had said, "You are as much occupied with trifles as other women, then."

At length the last day arrived, and with it a sort of calm, such as often comes to help people through long-dreaded days. Mr. Carr came to our house early, and did not leave us till five o'clock, when he had to start by train to Southampton. Lady Helen joined him in the afternoon; my mother pitying her from her heart, for having to share with us the last hours of her son's company.

How could she have borne it, if Hilary had been leaving England, and had chosen to spend any part of his last day away from her?

She and Nesta thought they could not show enough sympathy and kindness to Lady Helen that day. They measured her sorrow by their own capacity for suffering. Lady Helen was really thankful

to them for giving her credit for more feeling than she would have ventured to claim for herself. During that one afternoon, she accepted Nesta as her daughter, and professed to have no desire left but for her son's safe return, and that in the future, she and he might be more to each other than they had ever yet been. Nesta, she said, should teach her to know her son's heart.

I don't think she was acting a part when she said this ; I believe she was really living in a character which for the hour pleased her. People who have the art of deceiving themselves are by far the most dangerous deceivers of others. Lady Helen really felt what she said, while she sat in our little room, with Nesta's and Shafto's hands clasped in hers, and her son carried away with him a belief in her kindness and good faith, which gave her after words more weight than they would otherwise have had.

My mother and I took care to leave the three most concerned in the parting alone for the last two hours. We sat at our work in the dining-room, my mother wiping her eyes now and then, and talking to me about Hilary's wish to emigrate, and her earnest hope that I would do all I could to turn him from such a dreadful purpose. At last Mr. Carr came in

to us, very pale and quiet, to shake hands and wish good-bye. He stayed with us a minute only ; then the silence of the house was broken by the shutting of the front door, and we heard a cry upstairs which made us both run to the drawing-room. It was Lady Helen, not Nesta, who had cried out. She was in a fit of hysterics, and Nesta, with a pale, tearless face, and trembling too much to stand, was sitting on the arm of her chair, supporting her.

Lady Helen occupied Nesta and my mother all the evening. They made untiring efforts to calm and soothe her, and to find remedies for the really terrible fit of neuralgic pain which over-excitement brought on.

It was not till Lady Helen had gone home, and Nesta and I were alone in our room together, that Nesta's self-command gave way. Then it seemed as if the silent, heavy tears would never cease to flow. If they had not been so very quiet I should have minded them less. I should have hoped they might bring relief, but they fell slowly and heavily, one by one, as if they came from a source too deep ever to be wept away.

CHAPTER VI.

“ When some beloved voice, that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new ;
What hope ? what help ? what music will undo
That silence to your sense ? ”

F. B. CROWNING.

MY father and mother were disappointed in their expectation. Nesta did not grow happy, nor return to her old calm routine of duty as soon as the excitement of Mr. Carr's departure had passed away. When a page is turned in the book of life it is not so easy to turn it back again. Nesta could not do it, though she tried very hard. She used to sit in her accustomed place, with her work-basket before her, but the work was no longer done ; her hands would fall in her lap twenty times in an hour, and her eyes might have been looking over the mosques and towers of Constantinople for any service

they were put to in our room. My mother complained sadly of this constant absence of mind. Why (she would ask me) could not Nesta be as happy at home as she used to be? It was very strange. There was nothing she and her father would not do for Nesta, no indulgence they would not grant. It was hard, after all their care, to find themselves of so little consequence to the child they had best loved! My mother did not wish to be hard on Nesta, she said, but she could not help being pained by her lack of interest in home concerns. She had not made a single remark about the new dining-room carpet, and she constantly put Hilary's letters aside without reading them.

My father found in Nesta's continued dejection a reason to blame himself for past neglect. If he had cultivated her mind properly, he believed she would have had remedies at hand against sorrow. It was all I could do to dissuade him from beginning a course of mathematical study with her at once.

Lady Helen recommended constant change of scene as a more likely expedient, and that Nesta might have a chance of trying her remedy, she took her away from us every now and then for a day or two, and carried her about to balls and parties.

For a time Lady Helen's efforts seemed to have more success in rousing Nesta than any of ours. Nesta's excitement when a visit to Lady Helen was in prospect, and her utter weariness and dejection when she returned home, were some excuse for my father's constantly expressed fears that she was being changed into a discontented lover of pleasure.

I read her heart better, and understood how single her purpose was in seeking Lady Helen's company. I knew she was always hoping that Lady Helen would say some kind word, or let fall some cordially-expressed anticipation for the future, which would have been like manna to her hungry heart ; and her weariness, on her return, was caused by disappointment that no encouraging words had been spoken. It pains me even now to recollect how Nesta's eyes used to wait on Lady Helen's lips, how she used to start with pleasure when the opening words of a sentence sounded promising, and shrink into herself again when some double meaning in the seeming kind words was revealed at last. Lady Helen must have had some real power about her, to inspire us all, as she did, with so strong a belief that her will was fate, and her reading of the future the true one which time must bring. Even

Mr. Carr's letters to Nesta when they began to arrive, did not free her, as I had hoped they would, from her bondage to Lady Helen. Lady Helen received letters from him too, and she generally contrived to give Nesta some piece of information from them, which in part undid the consolation she had drawn from her own. How I dreaded hearing Lady Helen offer to read extracts from one of her son's letters when we came to call on her! Nesta never could summon resolution to refuse to hear, though she soon came to know as well as I did that she would surely hear something that would send her away less happy than she had come. Nesta used generally to have her own letter in her pocket, as a sort of safeguard, all the while; but I have known her take it out when we got home again, and put it away for a day or two, after hearing Lady Helen's.

I do not believe there was, after all, much in Shafto's letters to his mother that need have troubled us. It was Lady Helen's comments that put such painful meaning into them. She used to make every cheerful word in a letter a text to dilate upon.

"You see how happy he is" (she would say), "how his whole heart is given to his work. If he *had* taken any foolish step, which would have thrown

obstacles in the way of his advancement, how he would be regretting it now! After all, in a clever man ambition is by far the most absorbing passion. You and I were right about that, my dear Nesta."

Lady Helen would give Nesta's hand a congratulatory squeeze as she said such words as these, and look as if she really thought it would please her to hear them. Sometimes she used even to kiss her, and promise, in emphatic tones, that she would not fail to tell Shafto how reasonable Nesta had become, and how well she understood his letters. They say a person can be killed by constant pin-pricks. If mental wounds were as fatal as bodily, I think Nesta would have died of those which Lady Helen inflicted during one of those dreary mornings we spent with her in her comfortless London house.

Once or twice during this spring, on returning from entertainments to which Lady Helen had taken her, Nesta mentioned that she had met Mr. and Miss Moorsom. They were paying a visit of some weeks to an aunt of their mother's who lived in London, and who chanced to have some acquaintance in common with Lady Helen. I was curious enough to question Nesta very strictly respecting their behaviour to her. At the first meeting, Nesta

said, Miss Moorsom was stiff and cold, and Mr. Moorsom embarrassed; but when she and they had been thrown together once or twice in crowded rooms, where they knew no one but each other, they were driven into sociability. Nesta thought both brother and sister grew more friendly and kind every time she saw them; and she confessed that she could not help being pleased when, among a crowd of strange faces, she recognised two that recalled past happy times to her. She acknowledged that she found a ball or a concert less wearisome than usual when her Deepdale friends happened to be near her.

Lady Helen never mentioned these meetings with the Moorsoms to me, and her silence awoke an uncomfortable suspicion in my mind. I wondered within myself how large a part of Lady Helen's letters to Constantinople were filled with descriptions of those same balls and concerts, and of Nesta's enjoyment of them.

I had to work very hard during the last two months of the summer school-term, for Mr. Armstrong was not able to give me as much help as formerly. He was absent for a fortnight on a visit to his father, who had fallen into a bad state of

health ; and when he returned to London, his time and thoughts were occupied with some pressing cares, the full extent of which we, at that time, hardly knew. He who had so much sympathy to give his friends in their anxieties, talked very little about his own. The few times when he did speak of the troubles that were darkening his home, I chanced to be the person whose sympathy he claimed, and I could not help being glad that it was so. Just then it seemed to me that I was the one most at leisure to think of other people's sorrows. Even my father was too busy to seek Mr. Armstrong's confidence as he would certainly once have done. He used to ask me, sometimes, if I could guess why George had looked so grave all the evening. Such contented ignorance rather surprised me. I considered that the troubles of so old a friend ought to have been made a subject of constant thought ; and, to make up for the shortcomings of the rest of the family, I secretly occupied myself a good deal in thinking over them, and in grieving that we should have so little power of helping one who was always helping us. I doubt whether Mr. Armstrong would have approved of the form my sympathy took, for my work suffered in consequence of my bringing a

preoccupied mind to it. I had to sit up late at night to finish tasks over which I had been dreaming, and next morning I got up feeling still weary, and struggled through the day with a wretched consciousness that I had not time to do anything thoroughly, and with a dread hanging over me that I should break down utterly in the end. My mother and Nesta grew anxious about me, and some one (they both declared that they were not the culprits) wrote such an alarming report of my looks to Hilary, that he sent a pressing invitation to me to come and spend a month with him at Morfa Bach as soon as the beginning of the school holidays set me free.

The idea of leaving home was not as pleasant to me as it would have been a year ago. My father and mother were, however, anxious that I should have change of air, and my mother combated the scruples I raised about leaving her and Nesta, by telling me that she had not been quite satisfied, for some time past, with Hilary's letters. She feared he was out of spirits, and it would really be a comfort to her if I would go and cheer him.

A visit to Morfa had been the day-dream of my childhood. Now that it had become a possibility, I had to reason myself into enjoying it. I remember

I was quite melancholy over the last day's school-work. It happened to be a very busy day, for there was an immense pile of examination papers to be looked over, and my father wished to have my opinion about them before I left home. I shut myself up in the study, but I don't think I should have finished the work in time, if Mr. Armstrong (busy though he happened to be) had not contrived to spare a few hours in the course of the evening to help me. I had almost forgotten how to work energetically; it was really quite a treat to see how rapidly the pile of finished papers grew under his hands.

The last exercise was laid aside a full half-hour before my father came back from the lecture, and we had time for some talk, which, somehow or other, had the effect of sending me from home in braver spirits than I had lately known. Mr. Armstrong began by congratulating me on having successfully helped my father through another half-year's work. Our plan had, he said, answered better than he had expected, and he gave the credit to my diligence—my courage, he called it. I had not been feeling very courageous lately, so, to turn the conversation, I ventured to ask some questions about his family, which led to his telling me more about his own life—about the

difficulties he had had to struggle through, and the unhappy uncongenial home in which he had been brought up, than I had ever yet heard—than he had ever hitherto confided to any one, I remember he assured me. When he had finished, I said I thought it rather hard that he should have had so much care all his life, that even his youth should have been so troubled. But he would not let me tempt him to grumble. He could not call his life hard he said, for there had been one great blessing in it that more than overweighed all the cares. Some day he promised he would tell me what the blessing was; meanwhile, he wished me to know how often little things he had heard in our house had given him fresh courage when he was disposed to be down-hearted. Did I remember telling him one day the Norse story of the Rainbow Bridge and the River Clouds, Kormpt and Ermpt? I should be surprised, he said, if I knew how often it had helped him to get through a difficult piece of work, to call it Kormpt and Ermpt. I had forgotten the story, and Mr. Armstrong told it me over again very nearly, he said, in the words I had used three years ago. They sounded more like my words than his, but I could hardly believe they had dwelt in his mind so long.—“Once upon a time, Odin, accom-

panied by all his sons and daughters, set out to seek the fountain of Urd. They travelled over the entire world till they reached that highest point of the heavenly hills where the Rainbow Bridge touches the earth. Across this bridge lies the road to the Urda Fountain whose life-giving waters confer immortality on those who taste them. The portal of the bridge is guarded by the sleepless Van Heimdale, who can see for a hundred miles round, and hear the grass grow and the wool on sheep's backs. When Odin and his children approached, he opened the gate and permitted them to pass through, one by one; the youngest first, then the next youngest, till it came to the turn of Ving Thor, Odin's eldest son; but when he was about to place his huge foot on the tremulous bridge, Heimdale held him back. 'Great Thor,' he said, courteously but firmly, 'Bifrost is not for you; you do not need the support of its jewelled pavement to enable you to wade through the abyss, and therefore it is not permitted to you to pass over it, you are too strong.' The brow of Ving Thor grew dark as a thunder-cloud. 'Am I the only one of Odin's sons who is forbidden to taste the water of immortality?' he asked. 'Not so,' answered Heimdale. 'See you not

those dark river-clouds Kormpt and Ermpt, which also lie across the sky, and lead to the Urda fountain? Through them, if you will be advised by me, you will take your way.' For a moment Thor hung back. The river clouds were dark and cold, the bridge glittering and beautiful. Why must he take the least pleasant road to the fountain, just because he was the strongest? He had half a mind to go back and give up his share of the water of life, rather than have it on such unequal terms. Odin seeing his hesitation, thus addressed him:—' Son Thor, why do you linger? Kormpt and Ermpt lie before you, as Bifrost before us, and what can it matter if you reach the fountain of Urd over Bifrost or through the cloud?' At these words, Thor turned his back on the many-coloured bridge and plunged at once waist deep into the cloud. Firm resting-place for his feet lay under it. The sky was blue over his head. The arms of Ygdrasil were around him. Breasting the cold river, he urged on his way, rejoicing in his strength, and was the first of all the *Œ*esir to taste the immortal water."

"Just because he was strong," I said, musingly, when Mr. Armstrong had finished speaking. "That is very well for you, Ving Thor, but for my part, if

I might choose, I had rather *not* be so strong, and have the glittering bridge to walk over."

" You see, you cannot choose," Mr. Armstrong answered, smiling rather pitifully down at me. " And what is more, in our real stories, the question is not precisely whether or not we are strong. If Kormpt and Ermpt lie before us, we dare not doubt but that strength will be given us to make our way through them to the fountain of Urd. I assure you I don't like the look of the river-clouds any better than you do. I rather think that, of the two, you have been the most ready to plunge into them, and are making your way through them most bravely. I hope you are surprised to hear that I can apply fables, and call things by wrong names almost as ingeniously as you can."

I *was* surprised, though not for the reason he suggested. I had, however, no time to protest against the praise he had given me, for my father returned at that moment, and as it was getting late, and I had to start early the next morning, Mr. Armstrong soon afterwards went away.

CHAPTER VII.

“ The bounding in of tides,
The laying bare of sands when they retreat,
The purple flush of calms, the sparkling glee
When waves and sunshine meet.”

JEAN INGELOW.

THE long summer day was already drawing to a close when Hilary met me at the road-side station, where I had to exchange the railway-train for the slower conveyance that was to take me to Morfa Bach. I had been sustaining my spirits during my solitary journey with the prospect of receiving a very hearty welcome from Hilary at its end. I found, however, that I must be satisfied just at first to take his delight for granted. Hilary was far too business-like, and far too conscious of being known by every one at the little Tan-y-Bryn station, to give me any other greeting than a sharp inquiry as to what luggage I had, and a warning that the train did not stop five minutes.



I had mounted the curious-looking open vehicle in which I was to conclude my journey, and we had left the paved road of the straggling village behind us, before I had a good look at Hilary's face; then he turned round to adjust a shawl round my knees. Our eyes met, and I was quite happy.

“Well, Janet.” A volume of affectionate welcomes could not have conveyed more than those two words in that satisfied voice of Hilary's. I nestled up to him, and since both his hands were occupied in driving, contented myself with stroking his arm.

“What a great fellow you have grown, Hilary! How well you look!”

“Why should I be ill? It is you who are ill; and no wonder, mewed up in that hole of a house. How's my father?”

“Not so well as I could wish. The last weeks of the half-year always try him dreadfully.”

“Ah!” Here the horse got a smart touch with the whip, which made him change his already quick pace to a gallop, and gave his driver something to do to reduce him to order. When Hilary had leisure to speak again, he resumed his inquiries.

“And my mother and Nesta. Pray do they look as withered up and as yellow as you do? I wish

Armstrong had written sooner to tell me how ill you are looking."

"Mr. Armstrong! You don't mean that it was he who wrote to you about my being ill. Pray did he say I looked withered up and yellow?"

"What if he did? You need not jump off the seat, need you? If you fall down, there is no one behind us to pick you up. Are we going too fast for you now? Do you like this sort of thing?"

"Like it! Oh, Hilary, it is the most delightful feeling I ever had in my life; only I am afraid it will be over too soon, and I cannot look enough at the scenes that are flying past us—those trees—and oh! that jutting-out grey rock, with the ivy hanging on it, and those distant mountains—that dark purple one. Shall I see it to-morrow?"

"To be sure you will. Do you suppose it will melt into nothing? It is Pen-Maen-Mawr. No—don't jump up again; it is not safe to stand in a gig, at the pace we are going. Why child, you will see it every day, and all day long, for six weeks to come."

The assurance gave me almost too much happiness. Morning, noon, and night, storm and sunshine, how earnestly I promised myself not to lose any aspect in

which that solemn, purple shape, now dark against the evening sky, might clothe itself for my delight. I sat back, and enjoyed such glimpses of the country as our quick motion and the fading light afforded me.

Now I caught sight of a sloping green hill-side dotted with sheep; now I had a moment's vision of a winding valley between two overshadowing hills. At every turn fresh peaks of distant mountains shot up into our sky—a solemn host gathering round us. I felt as if we were entering an enchanted land, and dreaded to wake, and find myself dreaming. Hilary found time, every now and then, to point out such objects as he thought worthy of my notice.

“There, Janet; those two oddly-shaped hills leaning towards each other are called the Rifels; and now, just here—no, we are too late to-night; but just here, on a fine day, you can see the two peaks of Snowdon.”

“The Rifels. Then it is somewhere about here that Merlin is buried,” I cried.

“Is it?” said matter-of-fact Hilary. “Well—only don't throw yourself out of the carriage, that's all.”

Another half-hour's delightful silence, during which the grey twilight had given place to the cold silver shining of a crescent moon ; and Hilary stopped at a turn in the road.

“ Do you see those lights on the opposite hill-side ? ” he said.

“ Yes ; what are they ? ”

“ The Great House is there ; those are the lights from the windows.”

“ Morfa Mawr ? Oh ! Hilary, you must let me stand up, and see it better. Just remember all our old talks when we were children. How little we thought that you and I should ever be looking at it together ! ”

“ On the contrary, if I remember right, we thought too much about seeing it. Sit down now ; the house won’t have vanished before morning ; and, Janet, one thing I must warn you against, don’t be always referring to our old dreams about Morfa here. It is Mr. Lester’s Morfa, remember, not ours.”

We had now turned our back upon the lights, and were slowly winding up a steep road.

“ Where are we going ? ” I asked ; “ I don’t see a sign of a house now.”

“ Morfa Bach lies on the other side of the hill.

We are close to it now. This gate opens into the fir plantation that shelters the farm-house."

Plantation ! I called it a wood ; and I looked up at the dark heads of the trees, and down through long isles of sombre trunks, silvered here and there by the moonlight, with a delicious shiver of awe. "What is that sound, Hilary, a waterfall ?"

"Yes ; a mountain rivulet runs through this wood, and tumbles over a piece of rock into a stream at the bottom of our garden. It spoilt one of the best meadows of the farm, till I had the waste water drained away."

"A waterfall close to your house ! Why, what a paradise it must be, Hilary ! "

"H'm ! don't expect too much—and, Janet, I may as well prepare you—we are close to the yard-gate now." Here Hilary looked cautiously round, as if he feared to be overheard, and lowered his voice. "Mrs. Morgan, you know who she is—the old lady who used to keep house for poor Williams, and now does the same for me."

"Well, what of her ? "

"Why, you see, she does not take to your coming as kindly as I could wish. She *will* have it that I sent for you because I am not satisfied with her

management. Ever since she heard I expected you, she has been pestering me to look over her books, and talking about her honesty, and her misfortunes, and her being a widow, and I don't know what all. I am afraid you won't find things very comfortable just at first, but I've no doubt you will be able to talk her round. I shall leave the old lady to you, and keep out of the way altogether."

"Oh you coward!" I cried, laughing. "Big and formidable as you look, you are in bondage to old Mrs. Morgan."

"There!" exclaimed Hilary, "how incautious you are, calling out her name quite loud! Did not you see the yard-boy standing at the gate? He must have heard what you said, and he is Mrs. Morgan's cousin's grandson."

"How could I guess that he was Mrs. Morgan's cousin's grandson?"

"I may as well tell you then, once for all, that everybody here is related to everybody else, and that every word you say about any one is sure to be repeated before the day is over."

We had now stopped before the door of a low, long house, whose white sides and overhanging roof I could just distinguish in the moonlight. Hilary

lifted me from the carriage, and I soon found myself in a large, comfortable-looking farm-house kitchen, where Mrs. Morgan was waiting to receive us ; no formidable-looking virago, as I had begun to picture her, but a small, pale, doleful personage, who put her apron up to her eyes when she heard that I had been travelling for eight hours without having had anything to eat.

When I had paid my respects to her to the best of my power, Hilary conducted me to his own part of the house, a wing, containing some pleasant rooms. I was in a mood to be charmed with everything that night. How I admired the old-fashioned furniture of the sitting-rooms ! How delicious I found the sloping-roofed garret in which I was to sleep ! How thoroughly happy I was, making tea for Hilary, in an oddly-shaped apartment, all doors and windows, which, from its many sides, I christened the octagon parlour ! What fun it was, seeing Hilary's frightened face, when I had the audacity to find fault with the black toast and cold eggs Mrs. Morgan provided for us, and how I triumphed when I succeeded in preparing an eatable meal myself!—the first, I afterwards discovered, which the octagon parlour had seen for many a day.

Almost as delightful was my waking next morning, when the recollection of where I was, dawned slowly upon me as I watched the golden sunshine pouring through my curtainless window, and filling every corner of my room with dancing light; bright, clear light, very unlike the intrusive dusty London sunshine, which I had been in the habit of shutting so carefully out of our close rooms.

I did not jump up the instant I awoke, as I had resolved to do overnight, but lay still in a state of passive happiness, listening to the distant sounds of tinkling sheep-bells, and thinking of the description in the "Pilgrim's Progress," of Christian's and Hopeful's arrival in the land of Beulah, where all the cattle wore bells inscribed with "Holiness to the Lord."

Some harsh sounds from below, such as certainly never reached Christian's ears in the land of Beulah, warned me, at last, that it was time to bestir myself.

When I went down stairs, I found all the lower part of the house in a state of direst confusion. Peeping cautiously into the octagon parlour, I perceived that its furniture had been transferred to the garden, and that two sturdy Welsh maids, with

brooms in their hands, were occupied in raising clouds of dust from the carpet and curtains.

Mrs. Morgan met me at the door, with one side of her face tied up in flannel, and a duster in her hand, which she kept feebly flapping about all the time I was speaking to her.

She received my particular inquiries after her health very ungraciously, and when I ventured humbly to express a hope that breakfast would soon be ready, her indignation burst forth.

To be sure, she said, she might have recollected that, being a London-bred lady, I should be disposed to lie a-bed till other people were thinking of getting their dinner. She ought to have calculated on having meals to prepare at all sorts of unreasonable hours, but being far from strong she could not charge herself with more than it was possible for one person to get through. Mr. Scott had breakfasted three hours ago, and was not expected home till six; and since she understood I had found fault last night with the state of the rooms, and said that my mother would be surprised if she could see them—and such a thing had never been said of her rooms before, and she was a mother herself, and a widowed mother!—The conclusion

of her sentence, if it had a conclusion, was lost in the duster, which here served Mrs. Morgan as a handkerchief.

It was very absurd and annoying, but the kitchen door was open, and through the door I had such a vision of a sloping green hill with a wood at the top, and a winding-path leading to a gate in the wood, that I could not spare a thought to Mrs. Morgan's ill-humour. I told her shortly, that I hoped she would not fatigue herself in cleaning the rooms, which, however, would certainly be better for being dusted, and that I would get my own breakfast; and then I retreated to the larder, where I helped myself to a cup of fresh milk and a slice of bread.

The rest of the morning and the greater part of the afternoon I spent out of doors, in losing my way and finding it again, and in making all sorts of delightful discoveries about the neighbourhood of Morfa Bach. The afternoon sun was giving a fresh glow to the woods and hills, and paving the sea with a broad road of gold, before it occurred to me that I was doing Hilary no service by neglecting to appease his dragon, and that I ought to return to the house and see what prospect there

was of its being made comfortable for him before he came back tired after his long ride. When I reached the farm-house I found no one within sight or call but Mrs. Morgan's cousin's grandson, Morgan Owen, the yard-boy. From him I learned that Mrs. Morgan had been seized with spasms on discovering that I had entered the larder—that she had gone to bed, and desired him to ride to Tan-y-Bryn to fetch a doctor. It was a way Mrs. Morgan had. He had not been to Tan-y-Bryn, and he did not mean to go, not he. The girls had gone down the mountain ; they would come back when they liked.

Meanwhile the dust had settled again on the carpets and curtains in the sitting-rooms. I found them empty indeed, but neither swept nor garnished ; the tables and chairs still occupied a place on the centre flower-bed in the garden. All my previous fatigue vanished at this sight ; I secured the services of Morgan Owen by promising him sixpence, and with his help set vigorously to work. Two hours later, when the maids sauntered up from gossiping in the village, they were so surprised at the sight of the octagon room, that I thought they would never have done holding up their hands, and exclaiming to each other in Welsh.

I had selected the most available furniture to place in this room, and packed the rest away in the low-ceilinged square sitting-room which looked into the yard. I had arranged some books tidily on the shelves, and put away out of sight various saucers containing samples of wheat and other oddities which had hitherto adorned the chimney-piece. I had also filled the great empty fire-place with young branches of pine-tree, laden with pale brown cones, which I made Owen fetch from the wood. When he returned with his last load, I observed that his face wore an expression of great excitement.

“What is the matter, Owen?” I asked.

“It’s the carriage coming this way through the wood; I saw it!”

“Whose carriage?”

“*The* carriage. They be coming to see you, sure.”

“Who do you mean by ‘they’?”

‘Why, sure, the ladies from the Great House.’

Though I had not been quite twenty-four hours at Morfa, I suppose I was already infected with the prevailing ideas of the place. I certainly should not have been at all agitated at the prospect of seeing Rosamond Lester in London, but in the octagon-room I could not help sharing the perturbation into

which her coming threw the whole household; from Mrs. Morgan, who rushed down stairs in a clean cap, for no object, as far as I could discover, but to make a deep curtsey to her as she passed through the hall, to Morgan Owen, whose curious eyes I could see peering through the open window during the whole of our interview.

It was some comfort to discover that if I was unusually shy before Miss Lester, she was by no means quite at her ease before me. After her first affectionate greeting, her manner, though not exactly timid, was constrained. She began several times to ask questions eagerly, and then she checked herself, as if she feared to show too much interest in us. It might be that my answers were not calculated to promote conversation, for I was more occupied in looking at Rosamond Lester and criticising her appearance, than in listening to what she said. Remembering my conversations about her with Lady Helen, I could not help looking upon her as in some sort Nesta's rival, and I was sorry to be obliged to acknowledge to myself that she was more beautiful than I had previously supposed her to be. It was too proud and striking a beauty to please my eyes, contrasting it as I did with the

delicate loveliness of another face ; but I could not find any fault in the features, nor any want of harmony between the dark beauty of her hair and eyes and the exquisite bloom which gave her face its great charm. I wished I could help thinking of Nesta and Lady Helen while I was looking at Rosamond. I felt that it made my manner ungracious, and prevented me from saying a single pleasant or cordial word. I think we should have been reduced to looking at each other in silence if Mrs. Western (Miss Lester's companion) had not been diligent in taking up and re-uniting the threads of conversation we let drop. She questioned me minutely about my journey, and assured me more than once that she and Miss Lester had only heard of my arrival at Morfa Bach that afternoon as they were returning from their drive. It was Miss Lester who had insisted on turning round and coming up the hill to see me immediately, though the ponies were tired, and there was a danger of Mr. Lester's being kept waiting for dinner in consequence.

When at last they rose to take leave, Mrs. Western said to Rosamond, " My dear child, did not you come here on purpose to ask Miss Scott to spend a day with us ? "

Thus reminded, Rosamond looked straight at me, and said, "When can you come?"

The words sounded abrupt, but I was not offended. I saw there was anxiety in the expression of her eyes; she really wanted me to come. I said something about wishing to know Hilary's engagements before I made any for myself. They knew his habits better than I; perhaps they could tell me when he was least likely to be at home. I looked at Rosamond, but Mrs. Western answered, "I can only tell you that he is always busy. We hardly ever see him now; he has grown very unsociable lately. You must make him turn over a new leaf now you are come. He ought not to neglect his old friends as he does."

"At all events," Miss Lester interrupted, "don't let him infect you with his horror of our frivolous society. You will have many solitary hours which you may bestow on us, your only neighbours. Come to-morrow morning."

"Yes," Mrs. Western urged, "come to-morrow to spend the day with Rosamond and me, but also persuade your brother to dine with us on Sunday. Mr. Lester is tired of asking him, so I determined to try once more. It did Mr. Lester good to have your

brother's company, and it was such a help to us ! I think he can't know how much more difficult we find it to get over the Sunday evenings now that he has left off spending them at the Hall."

As Mrs. Western finished speaking, Rosamond looked at me and coloured a vivid red on cheek and brow.

"We surprise you," she said. "You can hardly conceive the mental state of people who find it difficult to get over their Sunday evenings."

"Indeed, I was only surprised to hear that Hilary did not always spend his with you. I thought it was an established custom. He shall come next Sunday."

It struck seven while we were crossing the hall, and, emboldened by Mrs. Western's kind face, I asked her if she did not think it strange that Hilary should be so late in returning home. He had ordered dinner at five, and now it was seven. Could any accident have happened to him ? It was not like him, I thought, to leave me so long alone.

Rosamond, who had nearly reached the door, turned quickly round, and answered before Mrs. Western had time to speak, "Not like him ? Ah ! I see I know my cousin Hilary better than you

do ; it is just like him. He will not think of leaving his business an hour sooner than usual for you or for any one.

Mrs. Western gently interposed. "He is always very busy, and he thinks it right to put business first."

"First and last you will find," Rosamond persisted. "You had better give your time to us, for I assure you it will be thrown away on your brother. He never has a moment or a thought to bestow on idle people."

"His sister will be an exception to the rule," said Mrs. Western, kindly ; "you need not be afraid, my dear. Your brother will make time to take care of you. There are poor people and sick people about here who will tell you that they have never known your brother grudge his time to them."

"No," Rosamond added, "for visiting them comes under the head of *business*—my cousin Hilary's word for duty. I hate both words. I am glad I am not a poor person to be visited for duty. I hope when you come to-morrow it will be for pleasure. Now we must go. But don't stand watching at the gate after we leave you ; get a book, and try to forget that you are expecting any one. Good-bye."

I watched the pretty carriage till it was lost in the wood, and then followed my visitor's advice, and occupied myself for three-quarters of an hour in writing home. At the end of that time I was too restless to sit still longer, and started out to the gate to watch for Hilary. Morgan Owen joined me there, and was just beginning to tell me what a many dangerous roads there were along the coast, and how fond Mr. Scott was of riding by the sands, when I caught sight of Hilary galloping up the winding road which led from the village to the farm-house. At what a pace he rode, and how well he looked on horseback ! I was glad I happened to be at the gate to see him come in.

His first words showed me that I must not expect commiseration from him for my solitary day and anxious waiting.

“ Well, Jenny,” he cried, in a perfectly self-satisfied voice, “ how have you been getting on ? I have done a good day's work, and come home, as you see, in excellent time. I did not think I could have got through so soon, but I managed it, to please you. Bless me ! eight o'clock, and you have been waiting three hours for dinner ! Well, try to persuade Mrs. Morgan to let us have it at once, and I will be downstairs in no time.”

We had another delightful evening. I would not allow Hilary to sit down to his writing directly after dinner, as he was half-disposed to do, but made him rest in an arm-chair, and listen to an account of my day. I was pleased to find that I could interest him by what I had to tell. Clearly to him, too, as well as to every one else in the house, Miss Lester's visit was an event. I was surprised to find that Hilary was determined to hear every particular connected with it. He cared to know how Rosamond was dressed, and that she was driving the grey ponies, and that it was her own wish to call immediately on hearing of my arrival. I had even to tax my memory to recall the exact words that she had said, and was scolded when I hesitated to supply them. It was not so long ago but that I might remember, Hilary thought.

When he had at last quitted the subject, and been occupied for some time with other things, Hilary brought it up quite suddenly. It was after prayers, just as I was wishing him "good-night."

"H'm!" he said reflectively, "I am glad, after all, that you put the room in order this afternoon. I wonder what she thought of it? She has never been inside this octagon parlour in her life before. I don't

know that I like the new arrangement of the furniture myself, but it shall remain now. Yes, certainly, whatever Mrs. Morgan may say, since she has seen it."

"Who do you mean by 'she'?" I asked maliciously—"Mrs. Morgan, or Mrs. Western, or Rosamond Lester?"

As I pronounced the last words Hilary rushed to the door, which chanced to be open, and shut it violently.

"There," he cried, "everybody in the house knows whom we were talking about. I wish you *would* learn not to shout out people's names, as if you wanted to be heard at the top of the mountain."

"But suppose it is known whom we are talking about; what then?" I asked.

"Well, well, go to bed, and give me the chance of getting some writing done to-night," said Hilary.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Silence, beautiful voice !
Be still, for you only trouble the mind
With a joy in which I cannot rejoice,
A glory I shall not find.”

Maud.

HILARY was much occupied during the rest of the week, and I was obliged to content myself in my solitude by looking forward to Sunday, when I knew I should have his company for the whole day. There was Welsh service at the Morfa Mawr church on my first Sunday morning, so Hilary drove me to another village church about three miles from our farm, and we had a delightful walk home after the service. I had my choice of the inland road or the path by the shore, and I decided on the latter, to the slight discomfiture of Hilary.

“ There was nothing to be seen on the shore,” he grumbled.

"That is why I choose to walk there to-day," I answered. "I know, by four days' experience, that walking through the fields with you will not be a profitable Sunday employment. You never can keep your thoughts in order, where there are broken fences, and strayed sheep, and patches of corn that want weeding, to catch your eye at every turn. Best put yourself out of the way of temptation."

I spoke in jest, but my words made a serious impression on Hilary, and he walked on for some time in silence.

"I suppose it's true," he said at last, "since you have remarked it too. You, too, find me a dull plodding fellow, without an idea beyond my business. Well, let it be so. What I do, I will do thoroughly, if it is only such matter-of-fact work as you intellectual people despise. No one can say that I over-value myself, or mistake my own position."

"Hilary," I cried, laughing, "if you could but see how proud and savage you look just now, you would not make such loud boasts of your humility. I really cannot keep up such a pace; you must calm yourself and walk more slowly."

"I beg your pardon. You see what a bear I have grown to be. Janet, I believe I did wrong to ask

you to stay with me. I have lived with clowns so long, that I am no longer fit company for civilized people."

I pondered a while, and then, knowing with whom I had to deal, I spoke out boldly. "Hilary," I said, "I will tell you the truth; you are altered. There is something wrong with you, but I am not sure that I know what it is."

"Try to find out and tell me," said Hilary.

"I will tell you one discovery I have made since I came here. I have come to the conclusion that it is not well for people to live under the shadow of a Great House, as you are all doing. I see plainly enough how most of the people about here are affected by what I must call the Morfa Mawr shadow. I should have expected you to lift your head out of it. You don't, and I want to understand why."

Hilary's face darkened. "Do you mean that I have become mean and subservient?"

"No, no, no! but you are stupidly proud and defiant, and that is almost as bad. You are not simple about yourself; you see things awry. Why do you let these people influence you so?"

"What people?"

"Oh, Hilary, you know; the Morfa Mawr people—the Lesters."

"Do they influence me unduly? I was not aware of it. I do my duty to Mr. Lester; but I care neither more nor less about him than I should about any other employer. The other members of his family cannot influence me, for I take good care to keep out of their way."

"Yes, and that is what I complain of," I cried. "Why should you keep out of their way? You are just as much Rosamond's cousin now as you were when you first came to Morfa. Why have you changed your manner to her? I know that two or three years ago you and she were almost like brother and sister. You taught her to ride—you encouraged her to visit the poor—you used to consult her about all your plans for them. Why should you treat her like a stranger now, unless she has done something to deserve it? You ought not to withdraw your friendship from her. No one likes to be deserted without cause by an old friend."

Hilary employed himself in throwing stones into the water for some minutes after I had finished speaking, and he was still turning his face away when he answered, "You exaggerate, Janet; you

call things by wrong names. You have not an idea how absurd your words sound to me. I to blame for withdrawing my friendship from her indeed! I desert her! No, it is too ridiculous! Desert—what a word! You don't know what you are talking about."

"I do quite well. I have heard stories from Mrs. Western which show me how intimate you and Rosamond once were. Why have you changed? How has she offended you?"

"There again you show how little you understand. *She* could not offend *me*. I take care to keep out of the way of being offended. She is Mr. Lester's daughter, and I am his land-agent. When we were both children, we forgot our relative positions. Now we remember them."

"It is in saying such words as these that you show your pride," I answered; "and, Hilary, I call it a mean pride. You cannot think for a moment that you are inferior to the Lesters in birth, in education—in anything but wealth. They are richer than we are, that is all. I don't like to see you making so much of that difference. It is a sort of homage to wealth. Are rich people and poor people never to be friends?"

"Friends!" Hilary repeated. "How fond you are of that word. We are friends, my cousin Rosamond and I—very good friends. We have never quarrelled, and we shake hands when we meet. That's as much friendship as I shall ever pretend to, or accept from her, I can tell you. I've something else to do, luckily for me, than to trouble my head about friendships."

"Hilary, what does make you so determined to shut yourself up in your work? I wish I knew what was the matter with you. I wish I could help you."

"No, Janet, take my word, it is best let alone."

"There is something, then?"

"Has not every one some trouble for which work is the best cure? I have no patience with people who sit with their hands before them grumbling, because they can't have everything their own way."

"There is no fear of your ever doing that, but you may run into another extreme equally bad for you. You seem to me to be working in a restless, feverish way, as if you cared less for the work itself than for not leaving yourself a moment to think of anything else."

"You have quick eyes, Janet; but don't try to look too far into my mind, or I shall lose patience."

"I wish you could leave Morfa. I see that, for some reason or other, you are not happy here."

"But I can't leave it. Come, I will tell you something of my mind. If I am more restless just now than I used to be, it is because I am bringing myself to bear the thought that I shall probably have to stay here for the rest of my life. A year ago, when Morfa first began to be at times intolerable to me—when I first felt it like a prison—I could promise myself that when another year had passed I would put half the world between myself and the people here. I don't know that I should have had strength of mind to do it, but I felt I had the choice. I could say, if certain things happen, I won't stay to see them. Now it has become so clearly my duty to remain here, that I must not think of escape."

"Why not? What has happened since last year to make you think you ought to stay?"

"Mr. Williams's continued illness alters my prospects here. He has told me that he means to give up the agency. It will be offered to me, and in the present state of my father's health I must not refuse it. I must not leave myself powerless to help you all when he is laid aside."

"Hilary, do you remember one evening last

summer, when you were almost jealous because Charlie seemed likely to do more for our father and mother than you? He appears disposed to fail us. You will have to fill his place after all."

"Well, I am not less ready than I thought I should be. If you had any idea what it costs me to take a step which will chain me down here, for the rest of my life, you would know that I do not grudge any sacrifice for them."

I stood still and looked round me—at the smooth sea, rippling in sunny wavelets to the yellow-sanded beech; at the white rocks, and the smooth green sides and wooded summits of the surrounding hills, all bathed in one flood of mid-day glory. "What a lovely place it is!" I could not help saying; "and yet you hate it."

"Hate it! Hate it!"

"Nay, don't look at me as if I had said something blasphemous. Did you not talk of being chained down here; did you not call it a prison?"

"What does it matter whether I hate the place or only love it too well? I know I should be better away, and yet I believe that if I were to leave it, I should always be longing to get back."

"Come," I said, "that is making out too pitiable

a case for yourself. Must you be miserable here, and equally miserable everywhere else?"

"Remember that you forced me to grumble. I did not want to begin; you forced me to talk about myself."

"I am glad I did; it is an excellent thing for people like you, to have a good grumble now and then, especially on Sundays. You will feel better for it all the week." I slipped my hand through Hilary's arm, and walked on for a little time in silence. "Hilary," I began again, "I wonder whether the recollection of our old childish talks about Morfa, and of mamma's conviction that it *ought* to belong to you, has any share in making your present position here distasteful."

"No," reflectively. "I don't believe that I am fool enough to be really influenced by such fancies. Yet I think it would have been better for me if I had come here without them. I should have fallen into my proper place at once. My connexion with the old family disguised it from me at first, and it is difficult to fit myself rightly to it now. Perhaps I have made too sudden a change in my manner towards the Morfa Mawr people, as you call them. I am willing to correct anything you think absurd

in my behaviour. To begin, I will go up to the Great House with you this evening if you like. I know that's what you've been aiming at all this time."

"But I do not wish you to do anything you dislike very much yourself."

"Did I ever say I disliked going to Morfa Mawr?" Hilary exclaimed. "There is nothing so particularly pleasant, I suppose, in sitting in the octagon parlour listening to Mrs. Morgan droning psalms in the kitchen, that I need grudge spending one Sunday evening differently. Besides, you have set your heart on going, so there's no use saying more about it. Here we are at the foot of the path that leads from the shore to Morfa Bach. It is steep; you will want all your breath for climbing. You can't spring up the hill-sides as Ros—as Miss Lester does."

There was no second English service within reach, and Hilary seemed to find his Sunday afternoon somewhat tedious. I had more than one reminder from him that we must not be later than five in setting out on our walk, and was at last sent up stairs to get ready a full half-hour too soon. When I had my bonnet on, Hilary thought it impossible to remain longer in the house; but as he was also very deter-

mined not to arrive at Morfa Mawr a minute before the accustomed time, we had to spin out the intermediate hour by walking very slowly through the wood. To calm his restless mood, I made him talk to me about past Sunday evenings spent with the Lesters. It was always safe to lead Hilary to speak of the first years of his life at Morfa. I had discovered that it was almost the only subject of conversation that really interested him. If he could be drawn on to tell stories of his and Rosamond's rides and doings in the early days before she grew up, and Lady Helen began to spoil her, his humour softened, and he became better satisfied with himself and the whole world.

I have not described the Great House, and I do not feel disposed to do so, for I never could succeed in admiring it. The chief impression made upon me by the grand suites of rooms through which Hilary and I were ushered that evening, was, that in none of them would it be possible ever to feel at home. I should have enjoyed walking from room to room, and admiring the beautiful and curious objects with which they were crowded, if I had been alone and might have looked at what I liked, and admired as much or as little as I pleased. As it was, I was wearied by Mrs. Western's re-

verential manner of introducing me to one costly work of art after another. She *would* be so very sure that I had never seen such beautiful things before, and that she was doing me a kindness by telling me what I ought to think of them. I thought Mr. Lester much altered for the worse since I had last seen him. He looked now a very old broken-down man, and the worn lines in his face had deepened into an expression of habitual discontent. His voice, high-pitched and feeble, had a complaining tone in it even when the words he spoke were meant to be conciliatory. He was laboriously polite to me all the evening ; but when he spoke to his granddaughter or Mrs. Western, the chronic ill-humour, from which he seemed to suffer, betrayed itself, not only in the sharpness of his voice, but in the peevish fault-finding remarks he addressed to them. Rosamond most frequently provoked his sarcasms. He was always watching her, even when he was conversing with Hilary or me, and I saw clearly that she could not say or do or look anything, which did not displease him, and jar upon his irritable nerves.

I pitied her with all my heart, till I saw that she was not disposed to trouble herself in the least about

her grandfather's ill-humour. Only once during dinner-time did I see the slightest shade of disturbance on her beautiful, proud face. It was when her grandfather peremptorily silenced a remark she seemed anxious to interpose, in a conversation between himself and Hilary, about some vagrants who had lately settled on a piece of waste land belonging to Mr. Lester. She obeyed, after two attempts to speak, but she bit her lip and her eye flashed. Hilary came in for a lightning spark of its indignant fire, though I am sure he did not deserve it, for he showed plainly enough that he was anxious to hear what she had to say. When we left the dining-room, Rosamond offered to show me the grass walk overlooking the sea, which had been my mother's favourite retreat when she was at Morfa.

“I am always glad to spend every moment I can out of doors,” she observed, as she led me through the library, where there was a door opening on the west garden.

“I think I should often like to linger here, however,” I answered, looking round the spacious room lined from ceiling to floor with books. “My father would once have been perfectly happy in such a library as this.”

"Then I am sure I wish he had it," said Rosamond, heartily. "It does not make any one of us perfectly happy, I can tell you. I never enter it except to use it as a short cut to the west garden after dinner, when I know that there is no danger of finding my grandfather here."

The library door opened upon a grass-plot, at one end of which was the hazel fence and green gate leading to the terrace walk my mother had described to us.

"You, too, like this better than the show gardens," Miss Lester said, after we had walked once down the terrace.

"Yes, indeed."

"I am glad you only said, 'Yes, indeed; ' I never like people who go into raptures about scenery."

"But don't you admire this scenery very much yourself?" I asked.

"I don't know. I like being out in the air—I like getting up upon the mountains and looking about me. I don't think I could live where I could not hear the sea and the wind. But I don't want to talk of them; I hate people who can't be satisfied without saying fine things, as if the mountains wanted *us* to praise them."

I thought of Shafto Carr, and wondered how he

and Rosamond managed to converse for half an hour without quarrelling. Rosamond spoke again first.

“ You said just now,” she observed, abruptly, “ that your father would once have been perfectly happy in my grandfather’s library. Why *once*—why not now?”

“ Don’t you know?” I asked. “ Have you never heard of our father’s affliction?”

“ Not all I want to know. Tell me about him—if you do not mind.”

I began, and was led on, partly by eager questions from my companion, partly by the look of real interest which softened her face, to speak more fully than I should otherwise have done, of our father’s state of health, of our fears for him, and of the kind of life I led when I was at home.

When I had finished, Rosamond uttered an exclamation that surprised me. “ How happy you are!” she said.

I had not been thinking so of myself, as I described the employments of my busy days, spent far from every beautiful sight or sound. I had been contrasting my position and hers with a slight feeling of self-pity.

My answer was meant rather as a reminder to myself than for her. “ I fancy my father would tell us

both, that happiness does not depend on outward circumstances. He says there are hardly any circumstances among which one may not be happy if one tries."

"Then he says what is not true," my companion answered, almost fiercely. "There are some things without which one cannot be happy or good, unless, like the birds in the air or the sheep on the hills, one is satisfied with eating and sleeping, and feeling no bodily pain. I call you happy because you have those essential things—good people about you whom you can love and look up to, and who love you. You are of consequence to some one, and feel yourself of some use in the world. If you were to die you would be missed."

"And you too," I could not help saying. "When you were ill, more people than you know dreaded lest you should die."

"Yes, but not because I was of any real consequence to them. I suppose my grandfather does care for me in his way, but it is a way I cannot bring myself to value. Your mother was good to me just because she is so good. She could not see a lamb dying on the mountain-side without wanting to help it. I thanked her for her goodness with all my

heart, but it never made me fancy that I *myself* was of any importance to her. Now that I am well and do not want nursing, she has forgotten me you see."

"No, indeed," I cried, "my mother has not forgotten you; but since my father has been ill, she has had so much to think of, so many troubles."

"And I deserve that she should not tell them to me, for I cannot help her; no one has fewer opportunities of showing kindness than I."

"How differently I have thought of you," I said.

"You have envied me, perhaps."

"I have been used to hear you called a most enviable person—one, whose every want was anticipated, and who had every advantage wealth can give."

"I have the advantage, if you call it one, of making part of the show of this Great House. My grandfather would no more allow me to want anything that he thought a person in my position ought to have, than he would allow his library to want a well-known book, or his drawing-room an appropriate ornament. I am his granddaughter, and everything about me must be in keeping with the rest of his belongings, that is all. He never considers my individual tastes or wishes. Just at first I was

pleased with the costly presents he lavished upon me, now I hate them. The only things I possess which I consider really my own, are poor Mrs. Western's little keepsakes, and stay, you shall see it—this worn cornelian heart. Do you recognise it?"

I did. I had missed it from my mother's watch-chain, when she came back from Morfa.

"Shall I tell you how I came by it? One day when I was ill, I fell asleep with it in my hand. I had been very restless, and it always soothed me to touch anything that assured me your mother was near. She would not disturb me, so she sat by my bed-side for hours without moving. I woke from that sleep nearly well. It was the turning point in my illness. I had the heart still in my hand when I awoke, and your mother said I was to keep it, to remind me to be thankful for my recovery. I sometimes wonder why I did recover—but even in my most bitter moods it does me good to look at this."

"Why do you not make friends among the poor people round?" I asked. "Hilary says you used to visit the cottagers, and do many kindnesses among them."

"Before I came out I had more liberty than

I have now. It was Lady Helen Carr who persuaded my grandfather to forbid my going into the cottages and teaching at the school. She made the fever her first excuse for interfering, but she also managed to put unjust suspicions into my grandfather's mind. He always now takes against any one whom I befriend. You heard what passed at dinner about the squatters on the Tan-y-Coed moor. Ever since I began to interest myself for them, my grandfather has been resolved to drive them from the neighbourhood."

"But are you sure he has not a better reason for wishing the country to be rid of them? I thought so from what I heard of his conversation with Hilary. Did you not hear what they said?"

"No, I was too angry to listen. It does seem so hard that I should be quite powerless to help people who look to me to interfere on their behalf."

Remembering her impatient words, and the flashing glances that accompanied them, I could not help saying, "Do you think you interfered in quite the best way?"

"Perhaps not. I suppose I ought to be prudent when other people's interests are concerned. Well, I will try again to make your brother listen to the

true state of my poor vagrants' case. Let us go in now."

After tea had been handed round in the drawing room, Hilary, Rosamond, and I adjourned to the hall, where stood a noble organ, and enjoyed an hour's music. Hilary blew the bellows, and Rosamond played and sang solemn strains of sacred music as Hilary or I asked for them. I soon left the choice to Hilary, though I was a little surprised to find how well he knew which composer's music suited best with the tone of the organ and the compass of Rosamond's voice. He had never condescended to pay the least regard to Nesta's music, and I don't think he knew one of her songs from another. The last song Miss Lester sang at Hilary's request was Mendelssohn's slumber-song. When I pause and turn my thoughts backwards, I can hear again the deep notes of melody rolling through the hall, and catch the complaining pathos (so it seemed to me) in Rosamond's voice, as she dwelt a little on the words,

"Have but a little patience, Slumber."

Hilary, still occupied with the pedals, bent his head forward to listen, and I was struck with the expression of his face. By some strange link of association,

it made me recall a bit of mountain landscape I had come upon during my rambles the day before—a deep still pool among the hills, very much shaded with overhanging trees, into which a small mountain rivulet was slowly pouring its waters. I had come upon it suddenly, and looked at it for a long time. The pool was so full of water, and the water lay in it so cold, so dark, so still, and yet it was drawing in ever more and more. Why did Hilary's face make me think of it, I wondered? When the last note had died away, Rosamond rose and turned to speak to Hilary. He started up from his bending posture near the organ, and stood bolt upright, drawing even a little backward into the shade, as if he were afraid that Rosamond's wide floating dress should touch him. I could have scolded him for the gesture, and for the expression on his face, both were so absurdly distant and proud. Rosamond's countenance changed too, as well it might; and when she spoke, her voice, lately so sweet, sounded harsh.

“Cousin Hilary, before you go, I want to speak to you. I hope you don't mean to take against those poor wandering people who are trying to make a home for themselves on the Tan-y-Coed moor.”

“It is not a question of taking against them indi-

ividually," Hilary answered; "but you know well that Mr. Lester is resolved not to allow vagrants to squat on the moor. I could not conscientiously advise him to do so."

"Conscientiously! I must say it is a kind of conscience quite incomprehensible to me, which obliges you to hunt a family of starving wretches from the last miserable shelter they have contrived for themselves—a shelter which a dog would not envy them."

"You are right in calling it a miserable shelter, and my conscience (believe in it or not, as you please) does not permit me to encourage human creatures in living contentedly like dogs."

"Are you ready to help them to live in any better way?"

"Certainly I am. If the man, who is strong and able, chooses to work, there is work for him at the mines, and I will make it my business to find his family house-room in one of the villages. I have told him so once, and shall again before I stop the building of the hovel on the moor."

"You mean to stop it, then?"

"Your grandfather orders it, and I cannot reasonably try to make him alter his determination."

“Are poor people never to have any choice, then? If that family prefer to live in a mud hovel on the open moor instead of in a house in the village, why should you interfere with them? You don’t want the moor yourself—it’s waste land. Why grudge it to them?”

“I beg your pardon, but you really are misstating the question. The moor belongs to your grandfather. He is surely right not to allow people of suspicious character, who will probably do great harm to other parts of his property, to settle there.”

“Oh, Cousin Hilary, you can’t think how dreadfully selfish this sounds to me. We are to hunt down these wretched wanderers because we are afraid they will take a few sticks from our woods, or a rabbit or a hare from our fields, which we don’t want ourselves in the least. Do you know that they have a sick child who can no longer follow them about? It is for his sake they wish to stay here; the mother told me so. I would give anything—yes, anything—to have them left undisturbed. But I suppose my wish will not have weight with any one.”

Rosamond’s voice sank as she came to the last sentence; she spoke it almost as if it were a question

instead of an assertion. I saw the corners of Hilary's mouth twitch, and his eyelids tremble a little ; and I, who knew him so well, understood this as a token of strong feeling resolutely repressed. To any one unaccustomed to read his face he appeared perfectly cold and passive.

"I am afraid I can do nothing to further your wishes," he said slowly. "I have neither the power nor the right to cause Mr. Lester's orders to be disobeyed."

"Very well ; we will say no more about it, then."

"If I might advise—"

"No, thank you. I wanted help, not advice. You say you cannot help me. I must therefore act for myself, or seek it elsewhere."

So saying, Miss Lester fairly turned her back on Hilary, and continued to converse with me till the time came for us to say good-night.

"Hilary," I said, as we were driving home, "are you sure you are right about those squatters? I must confess I sympathized in all Rosamond said in their favour. It does seem shocking that people who are living in such luxury as the Lesters should drive paupers away from their waste lands. Even Dives allowed Lazarus to sit at his gates."

“What an unreasonable, womanish way of putting the question,” growled Hilary. “Can’t you understand that Mr. Lester would be doing the worst possible thing for the whole district, if he allowed that waste land to be covered with squatters’ huts? The moor ought to be enclosed. I’ve told him so a dozen times.”

“If it is worth anything, why does not Mr. Lester enclose it? I thought bringing waste land into cultivation was his great hobby.”

“Yes, every piece of waste land but that Tan-y-Coed moor; about that he is just as obstinate as a mule.”

“By the way, is not the moor close to our farm—mamma’s farm?”

“Yes, it divides Tan-y-Coed from the Morfa estate. The boundary of the Morfa property falls within the moor, and that is the secret of Mr. Lester’s dislike to begin enclosing. About a year ago there was a dispute between Mr. Lester and a neighbouring squire, whose property also touches the moor, about their respective claims to it. We were nearly having a lawsuit, but Mr. Lester grew frightened, and compromised the matter with Mr. Owen; I fancy he paid him a considerable sum to

induce him not to urge his claim. If we were to begin to enclose, the question would all have to be opened up again. My mother might have something to say about it; part of the moor belongs to the Tan-y-Coed manor, if every one had his own."

"Would it do us any good to have it?"

"Not the least; for we have no capital to spend in reclaiming it."

"We might sell our right to Mr. Lester, as Mr. Owen did."

"What puts such money-making schemes into your mind this Sunday evening?"

"Oh, I don't know! only it does seem strange that the only little bit of land left to us out of our grandfather's estate should be that one poor farm at Tan-y-Coed."

"It is not at all strange. Our grandfather mortgaged every foot of ground he could mortgage to Mr. Lester, in order to raise money to work the Pent-y-Glas mines, which never yielded a penny till they came into Mr. Lester's possession. He could not mortgage Tan-y-Coed, because it belonged to his wife, and was settled on her children."

"Hilary, why was Mr. Lester so very much disturbed when his right over part of the moorland

was questioned? Why did he pay a large sum to hush up the dispute?"

"Who told you he was *very* much disturbed?" asked Hilary, sharply; "I am sure I did not."

"Don't look so cross, and you shall hear. Yesterday I had a long gossip with Mrs. Morgan; it was not my seeking, I assure you; she insisted on keeping me company while you were away, and she entertained me for an hour with complaints about Mr. Lester's behaviour to her son. Her son, as I suppose you know, is an attorney now living at Tan-y-Bryn, who was once much trusted and employed by Mr. Lester. It seems they have quarrelled, and now, according to Mrs. Morgan, Mr. Lester persecutes her son, though his only reason for disliking him is that he suspects him of having given Mr. Owen information which induced him to set up a claim to the Tan-y-Coed moor. Mrs. Morgan says further, that Mr. Lester was so much disturbed by the fear of being drawn into a lawsuit that he fell ill—had a fit, I think she said."

"Was that all she told you?"

"Now, Hilary, if you are going to be savage, I will stop in my confession."

"No; go on."

“Well, she hinted that Mr. Lester had good reason to dread any lawsuit which might lead to strict inquiry into his title to the Morfa estate. She said, it would have been a good thing for us if Mr. Owen had persevered in claiming the moor, for that other things would then have come out. Hilary, do you think it would have been good for us?”

“No, I am certain it could not. Janet, I hope you are not going to believe everything that silly sly woman says to you. Her son is a rogue; Mr. Lester left off employing him because he found him out in dishonest practices, and he now tries to annoy and frighten Mr. Lester by throwing out hints that he possesses some secret knowledge which he could use to Mr. Lester’s hurt.”

“Is Mr. Lester frightened?”

“He is very much annoyed. He can be in no danger of losing the estate, for he has held twenty years’ undisputed possession, and that in itself constitutes a title; but I can well believe that he would be sorry to have the particulars of his old transactions with our grandfather brought to light. I have no doubt that he took unfair advantage of Mr. Wynne’s ignorance of business. It is in itself a suspicious circumstance, that the mines never be-

came profitable until Mr. Lester owned them, though they were under his management from the first."

"Do you think Mr. Lester is a dishonest man, then?"

Hilary paused. "Since I have known him he has always behaved justly and honourably to every one. I have heard uncomfortable rumours about his conduct in former times, but it cannot be my business (trusted by him as I am) to rake up old accusations against him. Let us drop the subject; I am sorry we began upon it."

"Hilary, I must ask one question more. Is it possible—not likely, but possible—that any discovery about Mr. Lester's past conduct could give Morfa back to mamma?"

"No, it is quite impossible; no discovery of any kind whatever could disturb Mr. Lester's title now."

"If mamma had had any one to set up her claim twenty years ago, might it have been established?"

"I can't say; something might have been saved for her out of the ruin, or the whole property might have been wasted in lawsuits. I have no doubt it is better for us, and better for the Morfa estate, that Mr. Lester managed to step into peaceable possession."

"But one can't help wondering how it *might* have been ; if, for instance, mamma's uncle, Llewellyn Wynne, had lived. By the way, Mrs. Morgan was questioning me about him."

"Ah!" said Hilary.

"Hilary, I am sure she had a motive ; I am sure she had been told to pump me. I suppose there is no doubt that he is dead?"

"You sat under his tablet at church this morning," said Hilary.

"Yes, but he did not die here ; you know he died on his voyage to America. Mamma has often told us about her grief when the news of the shipwreck came, a few days before her marriage."

"Well, what then?"

"I don't know ; one can't help having fancies. Suppose it should turn out that he had been alive all this time, and suppose he were to reappear in England?"

"My mother would be glad to see him, I dare say," said Hilary ; "but I doubt whether she would have much cause to rejoice in his return. He left England in disgrace and debt, and from all I can hear of his character, was never a credit to the family. If he were living he would now be a

very old man, considerably over seventy. It is most unlikely that he should be still alive."

"Would he have any claim to the Morfa estate if he were?"

"Most certainly not. Oh, Janet, can't you understand that *no* one can disturb Mr. Lester now? How hard it is to drive a plain matter of fact into a woman's head when it goes against her fancies."

"But I wonder why Mrs. Morgan is so curious about Llewellyn Wynne? I am sure she thinks Mr. Lester would be very sorry to hear he was alive."

"She is no better lawyer than you, then."

"But her son must be."

"Perhaps! For the sake of his clients it is to be hoped so. But, Janet, once for all, he is a rogue, and I would not put myself in his power, or be drawn to share his schemes, for any hope of gain. Don't indulge in covetous dreams, Janet. You were talking to me this morning about the 'shadow' of the great house; I shall think it has indeed fallen on your heart if you let yourself be tempted to begin coveting it."

"You are right, Hilary. If Mr. Lester is now the rightful possessor of Morfa, it is coveting to

build castles in the air about getting it back again. How far we have wandered from the vagrants! Let us talk about them again, and see if we two cannot think of some arrangement which may satisfy Rosamond without irritating her grandfather."

We discussed this matter for some time, but Hilary saw difficulties in the way of every plan I suggested. The only conclusion we arrived at was, that Hilary should employ his first leisure afternoon in walking with me to Tan-y-Coed, and introducing me to the moor, and its would-be possessors.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Sweet is the rose, but grows upon a brere ;
Sweet is the juniper, but sharp his bough ;
Sweet is the eglantine, but pricketh near ;
Sweet is the fir-bloom, but his branches rough.”

SPENSER.

HILARY'S spare afternoon was long in coming, but meanwhile my interest in the vagrants did not flag. I heard them talked about whenever I went to Morfa Mawr, and Hilary seldom returned home in the evening without bringing some fresh news of their doings. It soon became clear to me that Mr. Lester and his granddaughter were disposed to make the question of their going or staying a trial of strength between them.

Again and again, by Mr. Lester's orders, the poor mud-hut they were building for themselves on the moor was thrown down—again and again they were

driven away, but invariably after an interval of a few days they reappeared in the same spot, or in the neighbourhood, tempted back, Hilary feared, by the gifts Miss Lester contrived to send them to compensate for her grandfather's cruelty.

"I wonder how she dares oppose her grandfather's wishes so openly," I said, one evening when Hilary had been describing to me Mr. Lester's violent anger on hearing of their fourth re-appearance.

"She dare do anything that she thinks right," said Hilary, triumphantly.

"But can she think this right?"

"She would not do it unless she thought so."

"Well, that *is* arguing in a circle," I said. "For once, Hilary, I perceive that your head and your heart are arrayed against each other. You think with Mr. Lester, but you feel with Rosamond."

"I don't. I think she is behaving as foolishly as possible."

"Yes, I know what you think, I am talking of what you feel. I confess freely that I should like Rosamond to conquer in the battle she is waging on behalf of these unhappy people. I should like Mr. Lester to be tired out, and obliged to leave them in possession of their den."

"You are very foolish in wishing any such thing. You don't consider the harm they may do in a neighbourhood like ours."

"I think you good people of Morfa might defend yourself against one poor family. Would it be quite impossible to let them stay and try to reform them?"

"Quite impossible *now*. Mr. Lester will never rest till the place is clear of them. His temper has been roused."

"It must be an excessively ungenerous, vindictive temper."

"An excessively tenacious temper—I suppose we must call it vindictive. My mother has told us how hard he found it to forgive his only son when he thwarted his will."

"Is he as faithful to his likings as to his hatreds?"

"Quite. Witness his constant affection for Lady Helen Carr. I do believe he looks upon her as if she *were* his son's widow. He has attached himself to her son entirely for her sake. If Mr. Carr had been anybody else's son, he would have been almost the last person Mr. Lester would have chosen to succeed him in the estate."

"Succeed him in the estate," I repeated, ponder-

ingly. "Do you mean that Mr. Lester still intends Shafto Carr to marry Rosamond?"

"That is what I do mean."

"Well, he will certainly be thwarted in that purpose. He can't make Shafto marry Rosamond if he wishes to marry Nesta."

I spoke confidently, but in my heart there was an uneasy misgiving. Morfa air had already infected me with the superstition that Mr. Lester's will was law.

Hilary was silent. I had hoped for an acquiescing word from him, but it did not come.

"Why don't you tell him that Mr. Carr is engaged to Nesta?" I asked crossly.

"I understood from my father that the engagement was not to be mentioned out of the family. Was there not some understanding of that sort between my father and Lady Helen?"

"Yes, she begged us to keep the engagement secret for a time. How deep she is, and how short-sighted we were! Hilary, does Rosamond like Lady Helen?"

"I believe not; and your question reminds me of something I wish to say to you. I had some talk with Mrs. Western to-day. She tells me that

Mr. Lester blames her for having so little influence over Rosamond, and threatens to separate them."

"To dismiss poor Mrs. Western?"

"No; he threatens to send Miss Lester away from Morfa. He will ask Lady Helen to take her abroad for a year."

"Surely Lady Helen will not consent to act the part of a jailor?" I said.

"She will persuade herself that she is doing a kindness to Mr. Lester. These domestic storms are very bad for him. He is not in a state to bear undue excitement. Mrs. Morgan did not exaggerate when she said that his annoyance about Mr. Owen's lawsuit nearly cost him his life. He had a fit, and was in great danger for some hours."

"But, Hilary, this makes Rosamond's conduct far worse than I thought it. If she knows that her grandfather is in a precarious state of health, why does she irritate him?"

"She has perhaps never been properly warned. Mrs. Western is weakly indulgent, and cannot bear to find fault with her."

"Why don't you speak to her—you who have known her so many years?"

"I!" The suggestion struck Hilary with so much

horror, that he could not sit still under it ; he closed the conversation by jumping up, and pacing the room with hurried steps for the rest of the evening.

When he was lighting my bedroom candle, he took up the thread of discourse where he had left it.

“ Not I, but you, Janet,” he said ; “ it is you that must speak to Rosamond Lester, and make her see the duty she owes her grandfather.”

“ It is my turn to say ‘ I ’ now,” I answered. “ I have known Rosamond Lester just a fortnight ; why must I be set to lecture her ? You have known her for four years, and are frightened to death at the notion ; besides, my hands are full already, with Mrs. Morgan. If you could but see her face when I attempt to insinuate any of the reforms you have asked me to bring about, you would acknowledge that one unwilling pupil is trial enough.”

“ Oh ! if you think it a trial,” Hilary began, resentfully ; “ if you have not sufficient interest in Miss Lester to wish to be of use to her, let us say no more.”

I had some difficulty in talking Hilary out of this sudden fit of sullenness ; but before we separated for the night, we settled that I should call on Rosamond the next day, and ask her to walk with me to the

Tan-y-Coed farm-house. We should pass the moor on our way, and could not fail, I thought, when there, to get into conversation on the subject of Rosamond's conduct to her *protégés*.

Early the next morning, Hilary drove me to the foot of the hill, and let me in to the Morfa grounds by a side gate which opened on the west garden. I knew I should not find Rosamond in the house at that hour, but she had pointed out her favourite garden haunts to me. One of them was a raised grassy seat at the bottom of the hazel-tree walk, and there I went to seek her. I saw her long before she saw me. She was sitting bareheaded on the low seat, holding a hazel-bough before her face, to shade her eyes from the sun, which fell full upon her. I noticed that, during all the time I was walking down the long terrace, she never changed her position, or even looked round.

It was a still day ; the leaves of the hazel-bough cast a moveless shadow over her face ; the unoccupied hand hung listlessly among the folds of her white dress ; her eyes seemed fixed on the point where the still blue water met the hot, cloudless sky. She scarcely seemed to be enjoying the scenery round her. It was rather as if she were herself a part of it,

as were the hazel-trees behind her and the daisies at her feet.

To see Rosamond at rest, one would think she would never willingly move ; to watch her bounding step on the hills, one would think she would never willingly be still. But, indeed, everything about her had a tendency to run into extremes. She was more indolent and more energetic, prouder, and more humble, more resentful and more tender, than any other person I ever knew. She and I made great advances towards intimacy during that morning's long walk. As we chatted together, she betrayed an intimate acquaintance with the ways and tastes of the different members of our family, which surprised and touched me. She knew my father's favourite books ; she had even taken the trouble to read some of them. She was acquainted with Nesta's taste in music. She had heard, and remembered the names of most of our acquaintance ; and she quite outdid me in recalling incidents of Nesta's and my childish days.

“ I have so few relations, I am obliged to make the most of those I have,” she said more than once, as a sort of apology for her interest.

We found so much to say, that I was in some

danger of forgetting the object of my walk. It was Rosamond herself, who recalled it to me. We had left the Morfa woods far behind us, and were traversing a steep road which wound round a barren hill-side, when Rosamond stopped me.

“Do you see that narrow path leading up the mountain? Could you climb it? I want to show you something.”

I demurred, for the path looked to my inexperienced eyes exceedingly dangerous, but Rosamond laughed at my fears, and, seizing my hand, dragged me up.

“Where are you taking me to?” I asked, looking with dismay at the green slope ending in a sheer precipice beneath me, and the steep ascent before.

“Only a little way. Do you see a thin wreath of smoke coming out of the earth? Near there is our goal.”

“I had no breath for further questions; I was soon reduced to climbing on hands and knees, and I was much relieved when, at last, Miss Lester landed me safely on a level square of ground, where I once more found safe footing. It was the entrance to a cave in the mountain side. At first I thought it was a natural fissure in the cliff, but further inspection showed me

that it had been widened at the entrance, and prolonged by means of two rude walls of stone, roofed over by branches of trees and turf. A tattered, dirty shawl hung across the entrance. Rosamond drew it aside.

“Let us enter,” she said; “the place is empty, and I want you to have a good view of the palace we are all fighting about. Here, the enemies my grandfather and your brother are hunting, have turned to bay. The earth has opened its mouth for them, you see.”

My first impression, on looking round, was a pleasant one; the aspect of the cave brought recollections of delightful Robinson Crusoe stories to my mind, and made me half expect to find bread fruit and yams growing outside the door.

A turf fire smouldered at one end, the smoke finding its way out through a cleft in the roof; over it hung an iron pot, supported by three sticks. A woman’s red cloak looked picturesque against the white chalk stone walls, and on a rough seat formed of piled turf sods lay a net, a quantity of cords and lines, a basket of rock samphire, and some scattered poultry feathers, very suggestive, I afterwards reflected, of the contents of the pot over the fire.

While I examined each of these objects in turn, Miss Lester went up to a heap of rags which lay on the floor in one corner of the cave. As she drew nearer, a dark head of hair, surmounting a wan childish face, reared itself up from among them, and two wild bright eyes turned angrily, distrustfully, from her face to mine. The sight of that face, and of the shrunken figure to which it belonged, dispelled my pleasant pictures of healthy adventurous life. I had seen sadder, more suffering faces, among the poor in London, but never one that struck me as having so little of civilized humanity about it. One angry glance the child bestowed on each of us, and then, with a little, impatient twist of the shoulders, he cowered down, and hid himself among the straw and rags that formed his bed.

Rosamond made repeated but vain efforts to coax the child to look up again. "I wish I had something to give him to eat; he would understand that," she said.

"Is he an idiot?" I asked.

"Oh, no; the other children are quite as wild, but I believe they are clever enough—too clever, people say. There is one peeping at us through the curtain."

I turned to look, but had only just time to catch a glimpse of a brown face and another pair of wild black eyes, before the owner of them slunk away. The loud barking of a dog, which seemed to come from some other underground retreat, now startled me, and not being particularly anxious to encounter any other members of the colony, either biped or quadruped, I suggested to Rosamond that I should be glad to begin my descent of the mountain side. As we left the cave Miss Lester slipped some money into the sick child's hand. The thin brown fingers closed tightly, understandingly, over it, but no word of thanks followed; the sullen face was not raised or even turned to us for an instant.

“Now,” Rosamond said, when we had scrambled down to the beaten path again, “tell me, what do you think of them?”

“Are they gipsies?” I asked.

“The woman is, but the man is not; his name is Connor. He is quite a character. He seems to have travelled all over England and Wales, and to have tried all sorts of occupations and trades. He has a great deal to say for himself, and holds very strange opinions. I had quite a long talk with him one day. He has an unprepossessing face I must admit, and

I fear a bad temper, for his wife and children seem afraid of him ; but, as far as that goes, so were Mr. Lester's. If that were reason enough to turn a person out of doors, there would be a great many vacant houses."

"But you know it is not the reason," I answered, shaking my head. "I am glad you have shown me your *protégés* ; but I must confess I have not seen anything that does not confirm Hilary's opinion of them. I can believe they are not particularly desirable neighbours."

"I don't say they are."

"Then why do you persist in keeping them here ?"

"I protect them just as I would any other ill-used, friendless creatures, as I would go out of my way to save a spent fox from being torn to pieces by the dogs."

"But would you save a wolf ?"

"My comparison is a juster one than yours, a very fair one I think, for it is the farmer's hen-roosts that are most endangered by my friends' neighbourhood."

"I wish I could convince you that you are doing no kindness to these people in tempting them to stay where, at best, they can have so few advantages, and

must have so much to suffer. Are you not deluding them with hopes of more substantial benefits than you have it in your power to give?"

Rosamond looked thoughtful. "To tell you the truth," she said, "I begin to suspect that they have another protector. It cannot be the little I give them which tempts them to hover about this place so long. Something I heard the other day convinces me that I have an unexpected ally. Have you ever heard of Mr. Morgan of Tan-y-Bryn?"

"Do you think I could have lived all this time in the same house with his mother without having heard more than enough about him?"

"Then you probably know of his quarrel with my grandfather. He and Mr. Lester were great allies once, and are bitter enemies now. Their first subject of quarrel was, strange to say, the corner of the moor which my squatters covet. Mr. Morgan was heard to say it did not belong to my grandfather, and my grandfather cannot forgive him for saying so. It is singular that any one should consider a corner of waste land worth fighting for; yet nothing disturbs Mr. Lester so much as hearing his right to the moor questioned. I suspect Mr. Morgan—who would do anything now to annoy my grandfather—is pre-

paring some attack upon his title, and that he encourages these squatters to build upon the moor that he may have an apparent motive for doing so. I gather this from something I heard on my yesterday's visit to the cave. You must not suppose I have any dealings with Mr. Morgan."

"I should not suspect you of such conduct," I answered, warmly; "but—"

"Well, go on."

"I think, having this suspicion, you ought to warn your grandfather. However hardly he may have behaved to other people, he has been kind to you. It is most strange that you should range yourself with his enemies."

"It must seem strange to you, who have had no experience of divided interests in your home. I have not been so happy. The very first feeling that grew up in my mind—along with my love for my mother—was dislike to my grandfather. Don't look so shocked. In excuse for myself I must say that my dislike to him seemed a part of my love to my mother; for I believed that all the sorrows of her life were occasioned by him. He was always interfering between her and my father. I remember, from my earliest days, the domestic storms that

invariably followed the arrival of a letter from Mr. Lester; how my mother never could rest till she had read it, and how the reading always ended in a quarrel between her and my father. She would shut herself up for days with me, weeping; and telling me how my grandfather kept my father in poverty and exile through hatred to her; and that he wanted to separate her from her husband and her child. It was the constant dread of my childhood, that some day this formidable grandfather would come and drag my mother away from me. When I was about nine years old my mother died, after a very short illness, and my grandfather came to join my father at Nice, where we were then living. My mother's death almost broke my heart; and though I was nine years old, I was unreasonable enough to connect my grandfather's coming with my loss of her. He arrived the day after my mother's funeral, and before he entered our house, everything connected with her was carefully put out of sight. Her picture was turned with its face to the wall; and every one seemed anxious to forget that there had ever been such a person. My father had been for years in very feeble health; but when Mr. Lester came, he seemed to revive. We left Nice, and travelled from place

to place, and had comforts and luxuries which I knew had been out of our reach before. How I hated them and everybody! I cherished my grief for my mother because I believed that I was the only person who regretted her. Six months afterwards my father also died, and Mr. Lester brought me back to England—the most desolate-hearted, sullen child in existence, I think. Do you know, when I look back over those old times, I wonder that I have grown to be as much like other people as I am."

"Now you tell me all, so do I. It is a very sad history,—but you grew contented and happy when you were settled at Morfa with kind Mrs. Western, did you not?"

"Yes, I had a few very happy years, though the sullen spirit would return at times, and I used to bring trouble on myself by rebelling against my grandfather. He proposed once that I should call Lady Helen 'mother,' and I would not. Oh, what a quarrel we had about it! That was our first serious struggle, and I conquered. I would have died rather than call Lady Helen 'mother.' She behaved kindly in begging my grandfather not to press the point, or I should have hated her. Do you know, it was hearing stories about your home life, that gave me

the first definite idea of duty I ever had. I admired what I heard of you so much that I set it before myself as an aim to become more like you, and so began to practise a little self control.

“ It must have been a very ideal picture of me you had in your mind,” I said; “ however, I am glad to know that we did figure in your childish dreams, for I suppose Hilary has told you how much our mother’s recollections of Morfa mixed with ours.”

“ Yes; your mother’s love for Morfa has always glorified the place to me. I have heard the poor people speak of her and of the old family till I feel as if she were an exiled queen, and we hateful usurpers keeping her from her right place. When you were a child, I dare say you did not build as many castles-in-the-air about your mother coming back to Morfa as I did. It was my constant dream. I confess that even now, I feel a sort of spite against my grandfather and myself for being upstart supplanters of an old family. You don’t know how bitterly ashamed I often feel of the display we make of our ill-gotten riches.”

“ I think you ought not to encourage thoughts which destroy your respect for your grandfather.

My mother does not grudge him his possession, and if she were here just now, I am sure she would advise you to submit to his wishes and make him as happy as you can."

"Would she, if she understood what my grandfather's wishes are? He wants to separate me from my dear Mrs. Western, and send me to live with Lady Helen Carr. I wonder whether you would advise me to consent to that, if you knew—" (here Rosamond hesitated, and then finished her sentence hastily) "if you knew what that first step in submission would lead to—what further much more important concession it would involve."

I did know, and I was far enough from wishing to give such advice. "Do you like Lady Helen?" I asked.

"I am afraid of her. She has a curious power over me. Rather than give her the chance of making a sarcastic remark, I say and do things that I hate myself for doing."

"I can sympathize with you. I know by experience how Lady Helen makes herself feared. How she can say the gentlest things and give the deepest pain by them."

"Ah! she has pained you, that is another bond

between us ; a bond that has united me to one friend already. My alliance with her son, Shafto Carr, is founded entirely on our mutual compassion for each other. When Lady Helen says bitter things to him, as she constantly does when she is in a bad humour, I pity him, and *he* shows *me* like sympathy when my turn comes. It was simply a defensive alliance against a common enemy, but from it one of my greatest perplexities has grown up. It does not answer for an unhappy heiress to make friends."

Rosamond paused here, and looked inquiringly up into my face. If I had been at liberty to mention Nesta's engagement with Shafto, I should have encouraged her to pursue the subject I saw she was approaching. Being bound to be silent on that point, I dared not allow myself to listen further; I felt that a half-confidence would be dangerous to us all.

We were now in sight of the Tan-y-Coed farmhouse, and, in order to change the conversation, I began to remark eagerly upon the poorness of the building, so very different from what I had expected to see. Till we reached the gate of the farm-yard, I rattled on about our old magnificent

imaginings respecting Hilary's estate, and the disappointment I feared Nesta would feel when I gave her an accurate description of the reality. Rosamond listened with an air of interest, but the full flow of confidential talk did not return. She was too sensitive not to feel that I had checked her at the moment when she was going to open her heart to me. We found Miss Lester's pony-chaise waiting for us outside the farm. Mrs. Western had sent it round by the low road, to take us home in case we were too tired to walk back over the mountain. I was glad to see it, for I was very tired, and had hardly energy left to give the curious house and untidy farm-yard the minute inspection I thought they deserved. While I was peering about the various odd nooks, and learning how oat-cakes were baked over the peat fire in the kitchen, Rosamond made a hasty sketch of the house to send to Ernestine.

I was glad I had this sketch to show to Hilary when he returned in the evening. He was so occupied in admiring it, and so pleased to dwell on the kindness that had prompted its execution, that he was disposed to be better satisfied with the result of my attempt at advice-giving than I was myself.

When I thought over what I had said and left unsaid, I could only comfort myself with the resolution that my first attempt to win Rosamond's confidence should not be the last, and that I would not let our intimacy decline for want of intercourse.

CHAPTER X.

“ Heigh ho ! the wind and the rain ;
For the rain it raineth every day.”

Twelfth Night.

IT was very well to resolve, for I had not then experienced the determined opposition that Welsh rain and mist might interpose against any plan which depended on being able to leave the house. The day of our walk to Tan-y-Coed was the last of the fine weather. For the next ten days the four windows of the octagon room afforded a uniform view of rolling white mists, or driving sheets of rain. I could watch the rain-showers with satisfaction as they swept over the hill-sides, bending the heads of the shivering trees, and turning the tiny watercourses into angry little rivers, which did not know how to make noise and bustle enough in hurrying down to the valley. The mists sent me shuddering to the wood fire, and caused me to waste a great deal of

time in trying to discover some spot in the octagon room which was not exposed to a draught from one or other of its four windows and three doors. The harvest was not safely housed when the bad weather set in, and Hilary suffered much uneasiness of mind in consequence. I could not persuade him that he did not make the rain less destructive by riding through it, and coming home drenched several times every day. He either believed that he did the corn-sheaves some good by watching them as they were whirled by the flood through the valley, or else he preferred even that occupation to remaining quietly in the house. When the mists and I were alone together in the octagon room, I occupied myself a good deal in wondering how the bad weather affected two very differently circumstanced families in my neighbourhood. How would the squatters shelter themselves from the storm in their windy cave, and what would be Rosamond's and Mr. Lester's reflections concerning them during the long days when they could have no out-door occupations to divert them from thinking?

We heard of the Connors first. One very wet, stormy afternoon, Hilary returned to the house in a state of great agitation, and summoned me to hold a

hasty consultation with him in the kitchen. He had met Connor on his way to the village, and learned from him that his wife was ill, and the sick child in a dying state. After a little discussion as to the best means of helping them, Hilary determined to go himself to the cave to see what could be done, and as soon as I had provided him with such warm clothing and nourishing food as we could get together quickly, he set out.

I watched him from the window galloping down the road, with a basket on his arm and a bundle of blankets and clothes strapped before him, and then I had a weary waiting-time. The September day wore to an end at last, and the storm and rain abated as the night fell, but still we had no news of Hilary. I was obliged to make friends with Mrs. Morgan and sit in the kitchen, discussing every possible and impossible accident which might befall a person on a Welsh mountain, so unendurable did I find the solitude of the octagon room as the hours passed. It was half-past eleven when Hilary came in. His clothes had had time to dry since the rain ceased, but he would not let Mrs. Morgan pity him on the score of being fatigued and hungry. Even I received short grave answers at first, and only learned what

I wanted to know through sheer perseverance in questioning. Hilary had witnessed a painful scene, and he could not make up his mind whether some feeling of self-accusation would not always darken his remembrance of it. The Connors had suffered much since the storm set in, partly from the exposed nature of their abode, partly from want of food and firing. The sick child had become rapidly worse during the week. Connor had gone up many times to the great house to inquire for Miss Lester, and had been roughly sent away by the servants. On returning to the cave that afternoon from a last attempt to get sight of her, he had found that one of the loosely-built walls at its entrance had been blown down, and that his wife had been seriously injured by a blow from a falling stone. Hilary would not give me a description of the state in which he had found the cave and its inhabitants when he arrived there: he evidently did not like to think of it. He had done what he could to relieve their most pressing necessities. He had brought a doctor from the village to set the poor woman's broken arm, and to see the dying child, who was, however, too far gone for medical aid to avail him anything.

Full as he was of compassion and remorse, Hilary did not alter his opinion of the Connors, and he would not encourage me to hope that we should be able to render them more than temporary service. He was resolved to help them as much as he could, but he saw they would prove difficult people to serve. The woman had been sullen, the man violent and full of threats against Mr. Lester, to whose cruelty, he said, he should always attribute the death of his child. Hilary hoped these threats would never reach Mr. Lester's ears. As it was, he feared his irritation against Rosamond would be increased by that night's sad occurrence. He would blame her for all the evil consequences that had followed the return of the Connors to the moor.

"Rosamond will be bitterly sorry for the death of the child," I said. "Surely her grandfather will not aggravate her pain by throwing blame on her. He ought to accuse *himself* of harshness."

"He might, perhaps, if the Connors were different sort of people, and if Miss Lester and Morgan had not taken up their cause. As it is, he will only grow more irritated, and consequently more obstinate and unreasonable."

"He is a regular tyrant," I cried. "Hilary, I

wonder whether we should have become as proud and overbearing, if we had had the Great House?"

"There, do you hear that clock striking two?" said Hilary, wearily. "If you don't go up stairs we shall have the sun rising before we have been in bed."

I hoped Hilary was able to compose himself to sleep more quickly than I did, for I had not closed my eyes before I heard him go out again in the cold, rainy dawn of the early morning. When we met at breakfast, he brought me news of the Connors, and detailed a great deal of business that he had got through on their behalf.

The poor child had died in the night, but he had made arrangements for the removal of the sick woman and the rest of the family, to a comfortable lodging in the village.

Hilary promised I should visit Mrs. Connor when she was settled in her lodging, but he would not permit me to go to the cave; he considered the ascent of the mountain unsafe for me after the long-continued rain. I consented to remain quiet that day, but felt a little ashamed of my idleness when I heard from Hilary, on his return at night, that Rosamond had visited the cave, and

stayed with Mrs. Connor till she had been safely conveyed down the mountain.

Hilary and Rosamond had met during the day, but I did not hear what had passed between them. Hilary seemed indisposed to enter into particulars. I gathered that Rosamond grieved bitterly over the death of the child, and that her indignation was strongly roused when she heard Connor had come to the Hall several times to seek her, and had been turned away by her grandfather's orders. Her anger and excitement were so intense, that Hilary feared she would be led to speak and act in a manner she would regret afterwards.

It was sad for Mr. Lester that his foes should be of his own household, but we could not help pitying Rosamond far more than we blamed her. Bitter thoughts, self-blame, and blame from others would, we feared, rise up for her on every side.

She was, certainly, much to be pitied, and Hilary, consequently, did little else than pity her all the evening. I thought, indeed, that she received rather more than her share of compassion, for we busied ourselves more with her feelings for the sufferers, than with those of the sufferers themselves.

Late at night, Hilary received a note from Mr.

Lester, requesting him to call at Morfa Mawr during the afternoon of the next day. I could see that he was glad of the summons. He explained his eagerness by saying there were several matters of business which were at a stand-still for want of Mr. Lester's consideration. It might be so, but I did not believe it was excessive interest in these affairs which caused Hilary to be so restless the next morning that he could not settle to any occupation ten minutes at a time, but was driven to relieve himself by constant dashes into the wet garden, or raids upon the men at work in the farm-yard.

The afternoon was tolerably fine, so I employed myself, during Hilary's absence, in walking down to the village to see the Connors. I took with me a basket containing a plentiful dinner for the children, and some comforts for the sick woman, and I flattered myself that my presents would secure me a welcome. I was mistaken ; my gifts and myself were received with a sullen indifference that entirely discomposed and silenced me. Indeed, if I had had courage to enter into discourse with any member of the family, I should have been puzzled what to say, the serious and comforting words that I had had in my mind during my walk would have seemed so inappro-

priate to the condition in which I found them. The man was stretched on the floor, apparently in a deep sleep, for he never moved or looked up while I remained in the room. The woman looked excited, her face was flushed, and she stammered when she tried to speak.

There was a strong smell of spirits in the room. Miss Lester had clearly done wrong in supplying them so liberally with money, for they were using it to their own hurt. The wild boys began immediately to quarrel and fight over the contents of my basket.

In strange contrast to this sad scene lay the little pale corpse. By Rosamond's orders it had been decently laid out on a clean bed in an adjoining room. The shrunken face, now that the dark elf-locks were, for once, combed and arranged smoothly round it, looked almost pretty. The wasted hand held a white moss-rose, which Rosamond had placed there. The poor little body had never, perhaps, had so much care bestowed on it, while it held a spirit.

Never did I return from a visit to a poor person's house more thoroughly saddened than when I left the Connors. I had so little hope that any of those now interested in their welfare would have sufficient wisdom not to do them harm instead of good.

I had made up my mind that I should have to wait long for Hilary's return, but I was mistaken. For once in his life he was punctual to the hour, and consequently, home before me. Mrs. Morgan seemed to think this a portentous circumstance, for she met me at the gate with a long face, and the news that master was *waiting* for dinner. I ran in, quite breathless with expectation.

"Well, Hilary, tell me what has happened," I said; not forgetting to shut the door cautiously behind me.

"Happened! what should have happened, except that you are late for dinner? Go and take off your bonnet; Mrs. Morgan is furious."

I went, but I was not deceived; Hilary *had* something to tell me, but I must bide my time.

When dinner was over, and prying eyes and ears withdrawn to the kitchen regions, I took out my work-box, instead of my writing-desk, as a hint to Hilary that I was ready to listen. He was not, however, yet in a communicative mood. He paced the room with slow, monotonous steps, till I grew nervous with watching him. I was just about to move softly to my desk and take up my pen, when he suddenly dropped into a chair, pushed his hair from his forehead, and relieved himself by a deep sigh.

"There's one good point about you, Janet," he began, "you understand when to hold your tongue. I know you are dying to hear what passed at Morfa Mawr to-day, and yet you have had the sense not to ask a single question."

"Not dying to know," I said, proudly resolved to keep up my character for discretion; "I don't at all wish to know anything you had rather not tell me."

"Humph!" Hilary sprang up, and took another turn in the room. He was now dying to tell me. "I have nothing to say that can give you pleasure," he began again.

"Then perhaps you had better not say it," I answered, drawing my desk towards me, and dipping my pen into the ink.

"Come, come, Janet," cried Hilary, "do leave those odious letters. Surely, when I have been out all day, and you have had nothing on earth to do but scribble, you might spare me an hour in the evening."

I laughed; "Well, then, let us be candid, and confess each to our own weakness. *I* am dying to hear what passed at Morfa Mawr, and *you* are dying to tell me, so sit down and begin at once."

Another deep sigh prefaced Hilary's speech. "I wish I cared less about them all," he said ; "I wish I could mind my own business, and not trouble myself over their quarrels and sorrows. I am a fool for doing it."

"But you would not be Hilary Scott if you could live among people, and not trouble yourself with their sorrows," I cried.

"All the same, it is no business of mine," said Hilary. "I cannot understand Mrs. Western ; she is certainly not a judicious person. She *will* tell me more of what is passing in the family than I have any right or wish to know. She throws out hints, too—absurd hints—about my advice and influence having greater weight than any other person's. She said she had observed this for years. It would be ridiculous to suppose there was any truth in what she said. Would it not, Janet? perfectly ridiculous!"

The forced laugh which concluded this question, seemed designed to cover the anxiety with which it was put.

"But, Hilary, why are Mrs. Western's hints so absurd? I have heard many people say, since I came here, that you have great influence with Mr. Lester, and that he does depend very much on your judgment."

Hilary tossed himself back impatiently in his chair. "Of course, in matters of business Mr. Lester trusts my judgment, or I should not be here, there is no question about that. We were not speaking of business, or—or of Mr. Lester."

"Oh, it is Rosamond, then, whom you are to advise. Well, why not? I wanted you to remonstrate with her before. Are things going on very badly at the great house?"

"Very badly. Mr. Lester was out when I arrived, but Mrs. Western had ordered that I should be taken to her sitting-room. I was there alone with her for an hour, and since she would talk, I could not help hearing. Poor woman! she is beside herself between those two. She has a sincere affection for her pupil, and a feeling of gratitude towards Mr. Lester, and it breaks her heart to see them at open war with each other."

"Is it open war, then?"

"I am afraid it has come to that at last. Mr. Lester was exceedingly angry with Rosamond for visiting the Connors yesterday;—he spoke very sharply to her on her return, and she defended herself, reproaching him with hardness. She was even imprudent enough to repeat, in his presence,

some of Connor's threats, and to say that she considered him justified in his desire for revenge. They parted at night in mutual indignation. Mrs. Western did all she could to persuade Rosamond either to keep away from her grandfather this morning, or to apologize for her unbecoming words. Unhappily, she would do neither. She came down and seated herself at the breakfast table as usual. Mr. Lester took no notice of her, said nothing till the letters came in. Among them chanced to be a letter from Morgan about this very business of the Connors. Mrs. Western does not know what was in it, but she gathered that Morgan must have used some expression which led Mr. Lester to conclude that Rosamond had instigated his interference on the Connors' behalf. A terrible scene followed. Miss Lester did not say a word to aggravate her grandfather, so Mrs. Western assured me, but she made no concession, denied nothing. She sat still and proud, as pale and quiet as a statue. At last, among other taunting words, Mr. Lester said that Rosamond inherited her perverse disposition and her love for low people from her mother, and, on hearing this, she got up to leave the room. When her grandfather saw she intended to leave him with-

out speaking, he became half mad with anger, and swore that if she quitted the room without apologizing for her disobedience, and promising to have nothing more to do with the Connors or Morgan, he would never see her again. For an instant Mrs. Western thinks Rosamond wavered. She stood a little time with her hand on her chair, looking down, and then she slowly turned, and left the room without a word."

"But will Mr. Lester never see her again? Oh, Hilary, how shocking!" I cried.

"He must," Hilary said. "He is surely too wise a man to consider himself bound by an angry vow. Rosamond must be persuaded to make the first advances towards a reconciliation—of course *he* never will."

"Mrs. Western wanted you to try to persuade Rosamond to submit, I suppose."

"She hardly knew what she wanted, poor woman. She had a vague idea that I could do something, and she did not consider how impertinent it would be in me to interfere between them, or how absurd it is to suppose that *she* would endure counsel from *me*."

"You did not see Rosamond, then?"

"Of course not."

"Hilary, you are a miracle of prudence," I cried.

“ I am not quite a fool.”

“ Did you see Mr. Lester?”

“ Yes, I waited till he returned, and had some talk with him.”

“ Well, what did he say?”

“ Not a word about the Connors; nor did he mention Morgan till I was taking leave. He signed the papers I brought, and listened while I explained the business I had to lay before him. He appeared to attend as usual; but, Janet, I was very much struck by his look and manner—struck and surprised. I can't get over the impression it made upon me.”

“ Is he angry, or in any way offended with you?”

“ No; I have often seen him angry—I know how he looks when he is angry—but I have never before seen him as he was to-day. Janet, I am not a fanciful person, but I could not help thinking that he looked like a man who had suddenly heard some very startling news. After all, he might only be tired. It must be living with you, Jenny, that makes me get such fancies into my head.”

“ And he had been speaking to Mr. Morgan,” I said, thoughtfully. “ Did you not say that he had ridden to Tan-y-Bryn on purpose to speak to Mr. Morgan?”

"I did; but take care—don't let us begin to romance about it."

"What did he say to you as you were leaving the room?" I persisted.

"He asked me to send all the letters that had passed between Morgan and me respecting Mr. Owen's right over the moor."

"Hilary, Mr. Lester cannot care much about keeping the moor. If he has heard startling news, it must refer to more important interests than that. Hilary, have pity on my curiosity. What do you think Mr. Morgan can have said to him?"

"Nay, if I knew, I should be wise indeed; perhaps, too wise for my own peace of mind and yours. I confess, Jenny, that a suspicion of there being more truth in Morgan's hints than I once believed, has lately forced itself upon me. I am driven to suspect that he has, or believes himself to have, a secret in his possession which gives him a certain power over Mr. Lester."

"But why, then, did Mr. Lester quarrel with him?"

"He did not quarrel with him till the twenty years had passed, during which a counter-claim to the Morfa estate might have been raised. The wonder is, not that he quarrelled with the Morgans



at last, but that he permitted them, first the father and then the son, to fasten themselves upon him for so long."

"When did the twenty years expire, Hilary?"

"Before I came here—just before Mr. Lester renewed his intercourse with us."

"Just before? Hilary, I see it—his conscience and his promise to his son, forced him to do something for us as soon as he felt himself safe; he could not bear to think of us before."

"Come, we are going too far," said Hilary. "We have no right to impute motives. After all, I am an idiot for giving way to a moment's suspicion. The twenty years have long since passed. Mr. Lester's title is established now, and it is vain to dwell on past possibilities."

"If the possibility of Mr. Lester's title being disputed *is* past, why does he still fear Mr. Morgan?"

"You ask as if you believed that I could answer," said Hilary, rather petulantly. "I tell you of the vaguest possible suspicion, and you cross-question me as if you thought I knew everything."

"Then, instead of asking questions, I will make a suggestion. Can the secret refer to Llewellyn Wynne?"

"Why should it? Why do your thoughts run always on Llewellyn Wynne?"

"Only because I learned from Mrs. Morgan, yesterday, that her son, during his father's lifetime, spent five years in New York; may he not have met Llewellyn Wynne there? You know Mr. Wynne sailed for America."

"And never reached it, according to all accounts we have of him. Janet, your suggestion is worthless. If Llewellyn Wynne were standing here in this room at this moment, his return would not affect Mr. Lester. Do you suppose that if he were alive, and if he knew that he possessed, or that our mother possessed, a shadow of a claim to such a property as this, he would remain inactive?"

"He may be very poor; he may not have sufficient money to return to England, and yet he may communicate with Mr. Morgan."

"No, no, Janet, I can't believe it. If Llewellyn Wynne were alive he would make his existence known to us. The poorer he were, the more he would need our help. Your conjecture will not do at all."

"Well, I have not another to offer."

"I am glad of it, for we have talked too long on

this subject already. I wish I could recall my confession. To put the hope of regaining Morfa into your head is as bad as throwing a torch into a dry woodheap. It will possess you—it will drive out all the sense you have."

"Nay, there you do me injustice, Hilary. Imaginations are not harmful to imaginative people. The real danger is, when a matter-of-fact person gets possessed of a fancy ; we true magicians have wands, and can keep our creatures in order. One fancy more or less will not trouble me. Don't be angry, Hilary, if I say that you are in more danger than I from such a hope."

"I know I am in danger, and I struggle against it; but, Janet, you misunderstand me a little too. If the thought of regaining Morfa has attractions for me, it is not because I am covetous. I have seen enough since I came to Morfa to cure me of wishing for wealth. What I heard at the Great House to-day makes my heart sick. So much wrong and sorrow, and I can do nothing. I must stand aside, and say and do nothing."

Hilary looked so wearied and, as he said, heartsick, that my compassion was moved. I perched myself on the arm of his chair, and began smoothing

out with my fingers the lines that care was already beginning to trace on his brow; but I could not give him other than that silent sympathy. I knew too little of what was passing in his mind to venture to pursue the conversation further; or rather, I was then just beginning to divine his thoughts, and yet dared not presume on my discoveries.

The clock striking eleven roused us at last. Hilary jumped up to light my candle with an exclamation of relief that the day was over. I understood the feeling. "Good night," I said. "You see the days do pass, Hilary, and they cannot always bring such trouble as this one has brought. Gloom has hung over Morfa so long, that surely sunshine must be coming.



CHAPTER XI.

" There be none of England's daughters who can show a prouder presence ;
Upon princely suitors suing she has looked in her disdain ;
What was I that I should love her, save for feeling of the pain ? "

E. B. BROWNING.

I SPOKE presumptuously. The days did, indeed, bring changes, but I was hasty in predicting sunshine, for we were then far from having reached the darkest hour that comes before the dawn. As we were sitting down to breakfast the next morning, a note was brought to Hilary from Mrs. Western, entreating him to come immediately to Morfa Mawr. Some terrible disaster had evidently occurred there, but the confused wording of the letter left us in doubt as to what it was. Hilary gave me no time to exchange conjectures with him ; he rushed to the stable, saddled his horse, and was gone while I was still puzzling over Mrs. Western's incoherent sen-

tences. Mrs. Morgan was employed meanwhile in extracting all the information that Mrs. Western's messenger could afford.

She learned that he was on his way to the nearest town to summon a doctor for Mr. Lester, who had been taken suddenly ill; and she also discovered that he was not in any great haste to fulfil his commission. She found him as ready to listen to her questions as she was eager to ask them. When, after Hilary's departure, I ventured to remonstrate on this needless delay, I was assured that half-an-hour, more or less, could not make any difference.

“Mrs. Western might console herself by calling Mr. Lester's attack a fit,” the man remarked indifferently, “but every one else in the house knew it was a fit he would never awake from. If he were not already dead, he would be, long before the doctor from Tan-y-Bryn could reach Morfa.”

It struck me very painfully that no one seemed anxious to take a more favourable view of Mr. Lester's case. Mrs. Morgan, and all the Morgans and Owens on the farm with whom in my restlessness I talked that morning, seemed to find a pleasant excitement in contemplating the extremity of his danger. They were quite unwilling to be deprived

of it, when I suggested that he might possibly recover, as he had recovered two years ago from a similar attack. Morgan Owen thought his funeral would be a grand sight, and did not hesitate to affirm that a person had no business to disappoint the expectations of the whole country-side twice.

“Why two years ago there had been talk of his funeral—*now* he was like to die.”

Before twelve o'clock Mrs. Morgan had mentally chosen the mourning Hilary was to give her, and decided the exact amount of the legacies each of the upper servants at the hall might expect. By dinner-time her thoughts had wearied of the funeral rites, and were fixing themselves on another ceremony, which she had no doubt would shortly follow, namely, Miss Lester's wedding. Mrs. Morgan decided that the young heiress would not be able to live alone at the Great House for long. Everybody knew she was to be married sooner or later to Lady Helen Carr's son, a pleasant-spoken gentleman, not very wise, Mrs. Morgan thought, but easy to guide. Times would be changed for many people when he and Miss Lester had it all their own way at Morfa Mawr. Her son, for one, might come to be thought of, and rewarded as he deserved.

I could only escape from her loquacity by betaking myself to the pine wood, where I hoped to waylay Hilary on his return from the Great House. I had a long waiting-time. I saw the cathedral-like vistas of the wood lighted up to their furthest recesses by the level rays of the setting sun, and then I watched the coming dimness of twilight grouping the trees together in impenetrable masses of shade—and yet Hilary did not appear. It was a solemn sunset-hour to me. From the gate at the end of the wood I could catch a glimpse of the gleaming white walls of Morfa Mawr, over which the shadow of death was then hovering. How trivial, how mean, all my past desires and imaginations about it seemed now! Then I thought of Lady Helen's similar wishes, and wondered if Nesta's happiness or misery were involved in the question of life or death that was being decided in one of the rooms whose windows the sinking sun fired.

I was so engrossed in thought during the last half-hour that, though I was leaning on the gate, I did not hear the sound of horse's hoofs, or see Hilary till he was close to the entrance of the wood. When he caught sight of me he dismounted, and led his horse through the gate.



"Well," I said, coming up to him and looking in his face, "what news?" He was so grave and pale that I could not help adding, "Is it all over?"

"There," cried Hilary sharply, "you are just like every one else, so ready to imagine the worst. One would really think you were anxious that it should be over."

"How did you leave Mr. Lester, then?" I asked, meekly.

"I have not lately left him. I don't come from Morfa Mawr."

"Where from?"

"From the station, where I despatched a telegram to summon Lady Helen Carr to Morfa."

"Do you suppose she will come?"

"She ought to come."

"To attend a death-bed! Lady Helen Carr! How little you know her. She won't come, Hilary."

"Who said it was a death-bed?" asked Hilary, in a sharp voice full of pain.

We were now walking side by side along the wood path. I came nearer to him, and slipped my arm through his. "Dear Hilary, I won't tease you with questions. Tell me as much or as little as you like."

“I don’t want to keep you in suspense,” he began
“Why should I? Only when one is feeling a thing
very much one’s self, the disposition indifferent
people show to make a nine-days’ wonder of it jars
terribly. I have done nothing but answer questions
for the last three hours.”

“Had the London physician arrived when you
left Morfa?”

“Yes. He does not hold out hopes of recovery,
but he thinks there will be no change for some days,
and that possibly there may be a return of con-
sciousness before the end. He advised that such of
Mr. Lester’s friends as he would care to see should
be sent for immediately. Mrs. Western and Miss
Lester thought it right to summon Lady Helen.”

“What is Mr. Lester’s attack?”

“A paralytic stroke. The servant who came to
call him early this morning found him insensible.
Since the doctors applied the usual remedies he has
showed signs of life. They think he is still uncon-
scious;—I don’t. Rosamond was in the room when
he opened his eyes. It might be fancy, but I thought
there was a look of recognition in them when they
fell upon her.”

“Oh, I hope so. I hope, if he is to die, that he

will recognise her and forgive her before he goes. It is terrible to think that they parted last in anger. How does she bear it?"

"She commanded herself perfectly during the few minutes she was allowed to remain in her grandfather's room, and that is all I saw of her. Mrs. Western says that her remorse and sorrow are terrible."

"Lady Helen will be no comfort to her. I wish we could do anything."

"We!" There was a bitterness in Hilary's tone which made me look inquiringly in his face. He understood me. "Janet," he began, "I may as well tell you, for if I don't, I shall always be thinking that you are trying to find out, and there will be no comfort in our being together. I don't expect you to believe that I am grieving over Mr. Lester's illness because of any great liking I have to him. He has been a friend to me, and in a certain way I shall be sorry to lose him; but I have not been thinking of him to-day. I can only think of his life or death as it concerns one other person whose happiness or unhappiness is hardly ever out of my thoughts. Janet, you know—or rather I hope you will never know—how terrible it is to see the person one loves most in

the world suffer, and to have to stand apart from her sorrow—to be nothing at all in it. I used to fancy it hard that I must stand aside in the time of her prosperity, in the gay bright life that lay so entirely out of my sphere. Now I know *that* was nothing of a trial."

I could only press Hilary's hand, and say quietly, "I am sorry for you."

"You are right to say nothing more," Hilary answered. "If it had been any other day than this, you ought to have told me what a fool you thought me."

"But I don't think you a fool," I said. "I don't see why you should not love her."

"I do. I see a hundred reasons. I make no excuse for myself, except that I don't know how any one could see as much of her as I once did, and not love her. Now you understand all my mind. Let us say no more. My feelings are not what it concerns us to speak about to-night."

"No, we will talk only of her. If you think Lady Helen's coming will trouble her, you may set your mind at rest on that point. Lady Helen won't come to Morfa. There will be a letter to-morrow morning to say that she is too ill to travel.

She will be afraid of the Great House in its gloom, and of Rosamond in her sorrow."

"Well, they will perhaps do better without her. Yet it does seem sad that he should not have the only person he much cares for near him in his last hours."

"Will it be a very bitter grief to Rosamond if Mr. Lester dies? They do not seem to have lived very happily together."

"No; and in that thought will lie the bitterness of her grief. If she had done her best to make her grandfather happy during these last years of his life, she could better bear to lose him. She will take all the blame of their disunion on herself. She will forget his faults of temper and think only of her own."

"Perhaps the trial may be spared her. Mr. Lester may recover. Was he not as ill once before?"

"Not *as* ill."

"Hilary, you said it was agitation that brought on the first fit. Do you think his interview with Mr. Morgan yesterday had any share in causing this second attack?"

"I do not know—how can I tell, Janet? Don't suggest a fresh cause of disquiet to me; above all,

not that. As I stood by his bedside just now, and looked on his stricken form, I was ashamed of my yesterday's suspicions. He has been a friend to me—he has trusted me—why was I so ready to believe the worst of him? I must put all such thoughts out of my mind if I am to stay here, and act faithfully in his and *her* interests. You must help me, Janet; you must not hinder me by suggesting feverish fancies."

We were now passing through the further gate of the wood; Hilary would have hurried down the hill to the house which lay straight before us, but I put my hand on his arm and detained him a minute by my side. I thought a minute's contemplation of the scene before us was the best help to peaceful thoughts that I could give him just then. Evening had already "saddened into night," but below our feet, in the direction of the village, were innumerable little lights glimmering here and there among the trees, in an irregular wavy line all down the valley. Other tiny lights, from lonely farm-houses and shepherd's cots, streamed out like sentinel fires from the sides of the hills. The evening star showed us where the sun had lately set in the western sea, and further away, a slender crescent moon, with a "star in its nether tip," hung between the two peaks

of distant Snowdon, making all the sky silvery-light enough to reveal, by contrast, the dark mountain heads lifted up into it. Earth and heaven were holding out their signal lights to each other. The sweet solemnity of the scene fell upon our hearts as we looked, and remained with us for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER XII.

“ We, too, have autumns, when our leaves
Drop loosely through the dampened air,
When all our good seems bound in sheaves,
And we stand reaped and bare.”

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

I WAS right in supposing that Lady Helen would not come to Morfa, but, with all my knowledge of her, I was unprepared for the amount of needless trouble she contrived to give us in order to justify herself in keeping away. My time, for the next three or four days, was principally occupied in receiving and answering telegrams from Broadlands. She was always sending us word that she was on the point of starting; we were always preparing to receive her, and yet she never appeared. I did not grudge my share of the trouble; I could not have given my mind to any occupation unconnected with the

events that were passing at Morfa Mawr, and my having undertaken the correspondence with Lady Helen, gave me an excuse for inquiring, almost hour by hour, how things were going on there. Thus, in weary suspense, passed those sunny September days. It seemed strange when I left the darkened house at Morfa—where people walked about with awe-struck faces—to turn into the sunny fields and green lanes, where the joyous bustle of harvest-gathering was going on, the more briskly for the interruption caused by the late rain. The air outside the house was so full of sunshine and busy sounds of active life, the air within so heavy with sorrow, and dark with the shadow of death. For many days Mr. Lester remained in a half-conscious state. It was as if the angel of death had been arrested in his work when it was all but done. The body lay motionless, hopelessly paralyzed, but now and then there were slight movements in the limbs, and the eyes opened and looked round with a terribly anxious expression. It was a condition sad to witness, still worse to bear, if we might judge by the distressed look on the sufferer's face, and by his spasmodic efforts to make himself understood, which resulted only in painful, inarticulate sounds.

As days passed, his intervals of consciousness became longer and more frequent, and his powers of speech partially returned. By the end of the week the doctors' final verdict had been given—the third fatal stroke might, they said, fall at any moment; but it was probable that the stricken man would continue in the condition he was now in for many months. There might be some improvement, but recovery at his age was not to be looked for. At first this opinion was received by those most interested in it, as a joyful reprieve. Rosamond's thankfulness at the prospect of her grandfather being spared till she could show him her repentance, was as great as her previous despair had been, and Mrs. Western and Hilary could not prevent themselves from encouraging her to hope the very best.

Before the end of my visit, however, the revulsion of feeling I feared had come upon them all. Quickly, as is ever the case when any startling event breaks up the old system of a life, a new routine of every-day occupation grew up, and they began to ask themselves how they should bear months, perhaps years, passed with that spectacle of life in death constantly before them. Mr. Lester was not easier to please in his days of suffering than he had



been in health. He appeared gradually to recover the full use of his mental faculties; he knew every one who came near him, he understood everything that was said in his presence, and he appeared to retain a vivid recollection of past events. The difficulty he had in expressing his likes and dislikes only seemed to make him feel them more intensely.

Rosamond soon had to resign her dream of atoning for past lack of duty by constant loving attendance on her grandfather. From the first hour of his being able to recognise those about him Mr. Lester showed symptoms of increased uneasiness and irritation when she entered the room.

Mrs. Western told me it was terrible to see the expression with which his eyes followed her movements, or remained fixed upon her when she seated herself near him. It was not a look of displeasure, Mrs. Western thought, rather one of pitiful, restless anxiety, as if he dreaded what she might say or do. Every one of her visits appeared to do him so much harm that the nurse who attended him (an experienced, and rather formidable person, sent down by the physician from London) took upon herself to suggest that Miss Lester should for a time absent herself entirely from the sick room.

I happened to be with Rosamond one day, when this woman waylaid us as we were on our way to inquire after Mr. Lester, and begged that we would not enter the passage leading to his room. His hearing seemed more than usually acute that day, she said, and when Miss Lester had come to the door in the morning, he had appeared excited and uncomfortable. It would be well for Miss Lester to keep quite out of his sight and hearing.

The request was rather unpleasantly urged, I thought. When Rosamond and I were alone again, I turned to her, thinking to say some comforting words about sick people being often unable to bear the presence of those they loved best; but when I had looked into her face, I felt the uselessness of attempting to gild over the truth.

"I deserve it," she said, "but don't say anything to me. Let me go away to my own room."

I never felt more sorry for any one than I did for her, as I watched her stealing away with hushed steps—that in her own home must not be heard.

This little incident occurred during my last visit to the Great House, and it filled me with so many painful thoughts that I could not help relating it to Hilary, and urging him to do all he could to

strengthen Rosamond in her present resolve of staying with her grandfather at Morfa, even though she were not allowed to be much with him.

I foresaw that Lady Helen and Mrs. Western would persuade her to seek a gayer life elsewhere, and I felt that it was her duty to remain near her grandfather till she had tried to overcome his dislike by patient, persevering efforts to please him. I was sure she would hereafter count those her truest friends who encouraged her to persevere in this painful duty, and I also knew that Hilary was the only person likely to do this. Mrs. Western would shrink from imposing a life of self-denial upon her darling, and Lady Helen had, I knew, her own motives for wishing to draw Rosamond away from Morfa, and under her own guardianship.

Hilary listened attentively to all I said, but I could not draw from him the assent I expected. He hesitated and sighed, agreed and disagreed with me in the same breath, and at last grew angry with me for not divining the cause of his embarrassment. He had to put it into words at last, for I would not help him.

"Janet, take care what you advise me to do," he groaned. "You have not realized into what circum-

stances you would throw her. Shut up at Morfa, her grandfather in that helpless condition, there would be no one to whom she could look for advice or companionship but me. It would be the old life over again. I cannot begin it again now that I have once struggled myself free."

"What old life?"

"The life we lived together when we first came to Morfa, when Rosamond was almost a child. She was glad of my company then, and of my help; when she wanted any indulgence, any pleasure, I must manage to obtain it. I was often able to gratify her, for Mr. Lester thought so little about her that he never discovered how many of the schemes I suggested to him had for their end the giving some trifling pleasure to her; and I—there was no harm in my acting so *then*—I did not know what I was doing: I do now. I dare not put myself into such familiar intercourse with her again. No, she is best away, or I must go; there is that alternative."

"I don't think there is," I answered, eagerly. It would be acting ungratefully to Mr. Lester if you embarrassed him by throwing up your employment at such a time as this."

"It would give incalculable trouble, and injure



several people besides Mr. Lester. I should be sorry to go ; and yet—”

“ You must not go,” I answered, decidedly. “ You are bound to remain here, and so I still think is Rosamond. Her duty to her grandfather stands before every other consideration. However, I will excuse you from the task of setting that duty before her, though, at the same time, I can’t help thinking —may I say exactly what I think ? ”

“ Say on.”

“ But you must promise not to jump up and begin to throw chairs about.”

“ Go on.”

“ I think, then, that you would not be so much afraid of advising Rosamond to remain at Morfa, or even of being again thrown into her company, if you had not at the bottom of your heart a belief—I don’t say, that she loves you now—but that she might come in time to love you.”

Hilary received my suggestion more quietly than I expected ; he was silent for a time, and when he spoke there was only a little embarrassment in his voice.

“ But even if it *were* true that I had such a thought, it would not in the least affect what we were talking about.”

"Would it not? I think it does."

"If she liked me ever so much—and, mind, she does not, I only say if—it would make no difference in my duty; she would still be a great heiress, and I should still be a poor man, bound not to take advantage of the peculiar circumstances that have placed her under my influence."

"Hilary, that is such a man's way of looking at things. You may call it generous; I call it selfish. You are not considering what is best for her happiness, or even what is for her good. You are thinking what the world will say about your conduct to her. You are putting your own reputation for disinterestedness above her choice."

"Well, call it what you like, selfishness or honour or pride or what you will, there are some things that a man cannot do. If Rosamond Lester remains heiress of Morfa, I, situated as I am, never can and never shall say a word to induce her to become my wife. Now Janet, there, I have said it; don't fancy you can alter my resolution by your words. You can talk yourself into believing that black is white, but not me. I have suffered enough during these two years, and not come to this conclusion without plenty of pain, you may depend upon that."



“But, Hilary, if you were sure that she loved you.”

“That I shall never be, for I shall never ask her; besides” (hesitatingly) “she does not.”

“I hope that she hates you, for you deserve it,” I said.

My reply was apparently not what Hilary expected, for he threw himself back impatiently in his chair.

“My father would think me right, Janet,” he continued, after a pause; “he would approve my determination.”

“In that case there is no more to be said. With this resolution, and the belief I hinted at, in your mind, you must not advise Rosamond to stay here; and if she does stay, you must continue to make yourself as disagreeable to her as you have been doing lately. It is an uncomfortable state of things; but, Hilary, I don’t pity you quite as much as you seem to think you deserve. You are not really as despairing as you pretend to be. Unconsciously you have let me see at what chink in your wall of obstacles the glimmer of light comes in. You said, if she remains heiress of Morfa—”

“Did I say if? How very absurd.”

“Not at all absurd. On that ‘if’ hangs the hope.”

that upholds your love. Far down in your mind you have a faint expectation of a coming change which will reverse your position and Rosamond's. Don't deny it."

"Why will you make me look at it?"

"Because this is my last night at Morfa Bach, and when I am gone we shall neither of us be able to speak of this secret idea which possesses us both."

"I don't want to speak of it. I want to forget it. Yes, Janet, honestly I do. Suspicions which were merely foolish before, become treacherous in my present position. If I accept the charge of Mr. Lester's affairs while he is incapable of looking after them himself, I am pledged to devote myself to his interests and I must forget my own. If I received information to-morrow which proved my mother's title to Morfa, I, as Mr. Lester's trusted servant, ought not to make it public."

"Happily I am not Mr. Lester's trusted servant, so I may indulge myself in what conjectures and suspicions I please. I am now quite sure that Mr. Morgan told him something which agitated him the day before his illness. I can see how curious both the Morgans are about this attack, and the son has a look of suppressed triumph on his face."

"How came you to see Morgan?"

"He was here spending the day with his mother; and she would introduce him to me. I was politic enough to be very civil to him, and I flatter myself I made a deep impression. He thought he was finding out a great deal from me, and all the time I was studying him. Hilary, I mean to give Mr. Armstrong the benefit of my conjectures and discoveries."

"He will laugh at you."

"I shall not mind that. I must tell some one, and you will allow I could not have a wiser confidant."

"Don't have more than one."

"You may trust me; when I have unburdened my mind to Mr. Armstrong I will let the subject rest. If he says there is nothing to be done, I will not even wish about it. I think things sometimes work round best when we let them alone; when we are not fighting for ourselves, 'the stars in their courses fight for us.'"

There was a short pause, and then Hilary asked, "What shall you say to Miss Lester to-morrow, if she asks your advice about leaving Morfa?"

"You have frightened me out of all wish to influence her," I answered. "I cannot bear the thought

of her being with Lady Helen. Yet, after what you have said to-night, I dare not persuade her to stay here. I shall escape my difficulty by not going to Morfa Mawr to-morrow. I will be very busy all day, and send a note of farewell in the evening."

"Nay, you must not deprive yourself of seeing her again; there is no occasion for you to make such a sacrifice as that."

"I can bear to make it," I answered, smiling. "Now, Hilary, we are not to begin the discussion again. I have several important household matters to talk about before I go, so please command your attention."

We tried to converse on indifferent topics, but by degrees our remarks worked round to the sole subject that deeply interested Hilary. He grew more communicative as I showed myself sympathizing, and discussed his feelings and his difficulties till far into the night. Even silent Hilary could be talkative when the plunge into confidence had once been made, and when the topic was Rosamond Lester.

CHAPTER XIII.

" New Year met us somewhat sad,
Old Year leaves us tired,
Stripped of favourite things we had,
Baulked of much desired."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

I HAD come to Morfa to seek change of thought and interest, as well as change of air. I had found it, yet it was with a feeling of relief, rather than of regret, that I prepared for my return home. Hilary and Morfa were very well for a time, but I confessed to myself that it had been a sort of exile—that I could look at the golden harvest fields and purple mountains and dancing waves, and yet feel my heart bound at the thought of exchanging them for the narrow London streets, and the air of my father's study. No more songs of birds for me, or sweet rustling of leaves stirred by the wind, or voice of the

sea; but, instead, should I not hear my mother's and Nesta's voices, and my father's step, and another sound which I had missed here, a certain knock at our door, which now for some time past had had something very friendly in it for my ears?

With these anticipations, I found it difficult to sympathize in Hilary's often-repeated wish that I could stay with him a month or two longer. He thought I should be so very anxious about the state of affairs at Morfa Mawr, when I could no longer pay daily visits there, so deeply distressed at parting from Rosamond Lester; that he did not know how to pity me enough. It had clearly become incomprehensible to him that there could be any vivid interest in life apart from Morfa.

Rosamond's answer to my farewell note reached me on the morning of my journey, just as Hilary and I were setting off on our drive to the station. I had only time to read it hastily once through, for Hilary asked to see it, and in the bustle of parting at the station, neglected to give it me again. It was a very affectionate note, and I was sorry afterwards that I had not kept it, and that I did not write in reply on my return home. It was evidently written in a mood of deep dejection, and almost morbid self-

reproach. Her farewell to me was more melancholy than the occasion needed. She seemed to speak as if her new resolution to atone for past rebellion by sacrificing all her own wishes to please her grandfather, must necessarily cut her off from all her old friends, and even make it wrong to cherish recollections of past happy times. I was somewhat alarmed for her when I came to ponder over the possible meaning of these enigmatical sentences, and I thought of asking Hilary to send me back the note, that I might read it to my father. He might, perhaps, suggest some wise words of comfort, or of caution against acting under the influence of overwrought feeling, which I might write to Rosamond, and which, coming from him, would, I knew, have great authority. I only hesitated to take this step because I feared it would lead to questions I could not answer without betraying Hilary's confidence.

While I hesitated, time slipped on, and I was startled one morning by hearing from Hilary, that Lady Helen had come down suddenly to Morfa Mawr, and departed the next day, bearing Rosamond off in triumph to Broadlands. He had not seen Miss Lester before she left, and he could not learn from Mrs. Western by what persuasions Lady Helen

had gained her point, or whether Rosamond was glad or sorry to go. She was gone, he wrote, and there was an end of it. I did think that her residence with Lady Helen put an end to all hope of intimacy between her and myself, and I therefore let slip the opportunity of establishing a correspondence with her, a negligence which I had great reason to regret in after-times.

Perhaps, in truth, the many interests and anxieties I found awaiting me at home threw my concern for the people I had left into the background. At home, it was just as if I had never been away. After the first day or two, when of course I was required to answer innumerable questions about Hilary, everything fell into its old routine. My father went backwards and forwards to the school; the exercises accumulated fast, and had to be attended to; Nesta sat in the window over her work, as silently as before, and my mother, finding me less communicative than she expected on Morfa affairs, talked a good deal about an entire change of servants, that had taken place during my absence. I was breathing the old atmosphere again, walking in the old paths. I had longed for them when I was absent. I had promised myself that I would never again droop

under the old burdens. How was it, that after the first week or so, I did not feel as I had hoped to do? Was I growing weak-spirited? or were the burdens really heavier by some one or two added "last straws?"

Before many days had passed, I could have told myself exactly what these final heaviest additions to the load were. My father was changed; his spirits and temper were more variable than I had ever known them before. During my absence Dr. Allison had paid a few days' visit to our house. I had heard that he reported favourably about my father's state of health. When I got home, I discovered that there were two opinions in the family concerning his verdict. My mother and Charlie resolutely put the best possible construction on every encouraging word he had said, and would not give any weight to the discouraging ones. He had told them to keep up my father's spirits, and they believed they should best succeed in doing so by assuring my father constantly that there was no cause for anxiety, and that he would get quite well, if he only would believe he was recovering, and not fancy himself worse every sunny day, when he felt a little more pain in his eyes. Nesta and Mr. Armstrong, on the other hand, had

received a very different impression from Dr. Allison's cautious words, and my father himself resented being told that he was better, when he felt worse, and disliked excessively to hear the matter discussed among us all. It hurt him that my mother and Charlie should attribute his sufferings to fanciful spirits and unstrung nerves; and sometimes he was moved by chance words which fell from them, to make exertions to which he was wholly unequal.

His daughters' extra care did not comfort him; I think he had rather we had left him alone, for our anxiety contrasted painfully with what he felt to be want of sympathy in the other two. I could not make him understand that it was no failure in affection, but lack of courage, which made them act as they did. Neither Charlie nor my mother could bring themselves to face the coming trial; they thought it better to turn their backs upon it resolutely, and cheat themselves into believing that the danger was not there.

In Charlie this cowardice resulted, I feared, from an inward conviction that he was neglecting to prepare himself for the crisis which might come. He confessed to Nesta and to me, that he could not resign himself to the prospect of having to take my

father's place in the school. The very thought was so distasteful that it paralyzed the little industry he had ever had. He acknowledged he had wasted his time shamefully during the last year, but he would lay the blame of his idleness on what he called his dreadful prospects. How was it possible, he asked us, that he could read very vigorously for honours, when the greatest success he could possibly win would only fix upon him more certainly the lot he dreaded? Since he had nothing to look forward to for the rest of his life but drudgery, he had better make the most of the intervening time. Of course Charlie kept these sentiments for his sisters' hearing, but there was a gloom on his face whenever the slightest allusion was made to his future occupation, which did not escape even my poor father's blind eyes. This reluctance of Charlie's to give him the help his infirmity needed, was by far the bitterest of my father's sorrows. I was glad when Charlie's departure for Cambridge spared him the being constantly reminded of it.

I hoped we should be more cheerful when Charlie had taken his remorseful face and constant grumbling out of the house, but it was not so. Painful as his talk was, it had yet served to distract Nesta's mind from a second anxiety which gradually grew

to be an all-absorbing one. I had seen from the first moment of my return that she was more unhappy than when I had left her, but it was some days before she could make up her mind to open her heart to me. Gradually, by sorrowful hints and half-confessions, I learned that while I had been away the Eastern letters had not come as regularly as formerly, and that the two last had given her great pain. It was only a misunderstanding, Nesta assured me eagerly—a misunderstanding which must soon be cleared up; but, while it lasted, it was very hard to bear, especially as she had not been able to keep her sorrow to herself, as she ought to have done. It appeared that several of Nesta's letters had failed to reach their destination. During the summer Lady Helen had usually asked Nesta to stay with her about the time when the Eastern letters had to be posted. She had some private way of sending despatches to her brother and son, and during the months she was in London Nesta had entrusted her with her letters, that she might share her privilege of writing as lengthily as she liked. Several of these lengthy letters seemed to have miscarried—at least no replies ever reached Nesta. For some weeks she had no letters from Mr. Carr, and then came an

angry epistle reproaching her with her long silence. Nesta did not show me this letter, but she told me that there were expressions in it which led her to fear that Shafto believed he had other reasons for doubting her truth than the mere failure in writing regularly. There was no exact accusation from which she could defend herself, but throughout an implied distrust, which pained her all the more because it was so vague. Poor Nesta could not conceal the trouble into which this letter threw her, and my father and mother naturally required her to explain its cause. I think if I had been at home, I could have managed to persuade them to leave Nesta to defend herself. As it was, my father thought it right to dictate a letter of remonstrance to Mr. Carr. It produced a short, haughty reply, in which Shafto, in his turn, complained of the want of candour with which he had been treated by every member of our family. He seemed to think we were seeking an excuse for quarrel with him. My father was much grieved by this letter, and wrote again—more decidedly, my mother told us, without being able to explain exactly on what subjects the letter had spoken with decision. When I came home, Nesta was waiting, with weary, sickening anxiety, for a

reply to this second letter of my father's. One fortnight had already passed without letters, but Nesta persuaded herself that she had not expected him to write soon. It was better that he should not write till his anger had cooled, and he was in a mood to receive our father's expostulation kindly. When the end of a second fortnight came and brought no tidings, Nesta was seized with a conviction that something terrible had happened. She was sure that Shafto was very ill, perhaps dying, for he would not be so cruelly silent if he could write. She was so thoroughly persuaded of this, and so miserably anxious, that we all felt relieved when a letter came from Lady Helen Carr, in answer to one I had written at Nesta's urgent request. The first part of Lady Helen's letter detailed her plans for a winter's tour with Rosamond Lester; only quite at the end did she notice the sentence, in which I had rather insinuated than expressed a desire to know what accounts she had lately received of her son. What did I mean by putting such a question to her? she asked. It passed her poor comprehension. She always considered it an impertinence to give us news of Shafto, since we were in far more intimate communication with him than she was.

He was a very unsatisfactory correspondent, and rarely answered a letter; but she was not anxious about him. She heard frequently from her brother, and the accounts he gave of Shafto's perfect health and brilliant spirits were so satisfactory, that she would not allow herself to be alarmed by my hints.

Perfect health and brilliant spirits! Nesta took the letter from me and read the words over again to herself. The colour returned to her pale cheeks, her heavy eyes brightened, and for a time she was comforted. *He* was well and *happy*. Her voice faltered a little as she repeated the last word; but she said it again and again when we talked over the letter together. He was well and happy, and for herself—she folded her hands patiently—it was only waiting a little longer. He *could* not be very angry with her if he were happy. Yes, she would wait.

It was well for our family peace that Nesta's gentle patience and feminine reserve disposed her to agree with my father in thinking that she could do nothing but wait. She had written once to Shafto a gentle, dignified little letter, which ought to have removed any false impression that had been raised against her. Till her note had received some acknowledgment, she agreed with my father that it would

not become her to write again. I used to admire her with all my heart, for I sometimes felt that I could not have borne so much pain in silence.

I do think that of all the unkindnesses one person can inflict upon another, that of keeping friend or lover waiting in suspense for an important letter is the cruellest. If a blow is to fall, let it come at once, not after all the strength to bear it has wasted away under the slow agonies of feverish expectation.

After an interval—I forget how long—came another letter from Lady Helen. It was a cheerful letter, provokingly kind and cordial. She informed us, that she and Rosamond Lester were going to start for Italy in a fortnight, and she entered into minute details about their intended tour. It included a visit to her brother at Constantinople, and possibly, if Shafto could be spared to accompany them, a short sojourn in the Holy Land. And, by the way, talking of Shafto (she wrote), what did we all think of his refusal to return to England? Of course we knew that his uncle had procured him the offer of a Government appointment in England, and that he had declined it, preferring to remain abroad. It was really very crazy of Shafto. Lord Denbigh had made the greatest exertions to obtain him the offer of this

same appointment. What had Nesta been thinking of to allow Shafto to let slip such an opportunity? She really must look closely after him, and try to teach him to be more practical, or he would let his life pass before he had settled to anything.

Lady Helen wound up the letter by protesting that she should scold her son when she saw him, on Nesta's account. She would tell him plainly that his idleness exposed him to the charge of being indifferent to her, and really gave my father and mother just reason to complain. The light words, the indifferent tone, jarred upon us all. I was sorry that my father had asked me to read the letter aloud, but I did not at the time anticipate the serious consequences that would result from his hearing it.

Lady Helen's inuendoes did not make much impression on Nesta. Her mind was wholly absorbed in contemplating one aspect of her trouble; she could not see any other. Shafto was angry with her; Shafto would not write, while this cloud hung over her, she had no thoughts to spare for anything else that he did or left undone. My mother ventured to remark timidly to my father, that we had no right to question the propriety of Mr. Carr's decisions on his own affairs. Till he wrote and explained him-

self, might we not hope that he had some sufficient reason to give for refusing to return to England, and that his prolonged absence did not necessarily show any reluctance to fulfil his engagement to Nesta?

Unhappily, my father was of a different opinion. When I talked over Lady Helen's letter with him, I was dismayed to see the impression her words had made. The sight of Nesta's misery had, for some time past, been daily increasing his indignation against Mr. Carr. This new proof of his indifference destroyed the last remnant of his patience. He could no longer submit, he said, to see his daughter treated with contempt. When I tried to lay part of the blame on Lady Helen, and told him my suspicion that she had kept back Nesta's letters and misrepresented her conduct to Shafto, he silenced me. A man who could believe insinuations against Nesta was not worthy of her, he said, and should never be trusted with her. He had long blamed himself for having ever given his consent to Nesta's engagement. Now that such a strong reason for withdrawing it had arisen, he felt bound to act with decision. He should write at once, he said, to Mr. Carr, and tell him that he considered his long silence and his refusal to return to England sufficient proof that his affection

for Nesta had declined. Such being the case, he thought it best for his daughter's happiness that the engagement between them should be considered at an end, and that their correspondence should not be resumed. My mother and I did all we could, first to delay the writing of this letter, and then to soften the expressions in it; but my father was inexorable. He believed that anything would be better for Nesta than the suspense in which she had lived during the last three months, and he thought the infliction of any present pain merciful which saved her from the great future misfortune of uniting herself with a man who had proved himself so little worthy of her confidence.

I took upon myself the task of telling Nesta when my father's letter was written, for I thought she could best bear to hear the painful intelligence from me. But how I dreaded telling her! She had been so good and patient during these trying weeks of suspense, that it seemed cruel to be in such haste to deprive her of the little thread of hope, to which I knew she would cling, so long as nothing was said about breaking the engagement on either side. I felt like an executioner, when I went up to her room the evening after my father had written to Mr. Carr. The first

effect of my communication was rather different from what I had expected. For the only time in her life, Nesta was seized with a fit of resentment against us all, and her unaccustomed anger gave her a fictitious strength. What right had any one, even her father, to interfere between her and him, she asked. No one but herself could know how impossible it was that he should really change to her, or how utterly unjust it must be to bring such an accusation against him. She had no doubt herself that he had had a good reason for being angry with her. At all events, we had given him one now. He would be pained beyond forgiveness by my father's letter. She could never, she said, blame him again, however unforgiving he showed himself; she could not expect him ever to love her again now.

For a short time, Nesta found a sort of comfort in saying such words as these, it eased her sore heart to have some one to blame but him. To take his part against other people and think him aggrieved, seemed to put them at one again and give her a sort of fellowship with him once more.

This mood lasted for a day or two, and then there came a reaction. She saw how deeply my father and mother were pained by her reserve towards them, and

she had not the heart to cherish her anger any longer ; it went out at once and left her almost heart-broken, with a feeling of remorse added to her sorrow. Those were terrible days. If Nesta and I had not loved each other so much, I don't know how she would have lived through them. It was a great help to her, that all the fond exclusive love she had had for me in her childhood seemed to revive at that time. She clung to me, she seemed almost to live through me. I think a trouble that had come lately into my own life, helped me to understand her and comfort her better than I could have done a few months before.

After a time, from the very depth of her woe, a pale sickly hope gleamed up. Shafto must surely, she thought, write in answer to our father's letter, and in this reply she began to hope there might be some word from which she could extract comfort. Perhaps there might even be a farewell note for her. To have one more word from him seemed now to Nesta the only thing to be longed for. With that excuse she fell once again into her old habit of counting the days between the mails, and of having weary, weary watchings on certain days for the postman's knock, and terribly anxious moments, followed by heart-

sickening disappointments when it came and yet never heralded the wished-for letter. Weeks passed in this way. No letter from Mr. Carr ever did come, and the autumn days darkened into winter ones before Nesta ceased to expect it.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ From all a closer interest flourished up,
Tenderness, touch by touch : and, last, to these
Love, like an Alpine harebell, hung with tears,
By some cold morning glacier, frail at first
And feeble, all unconscious of itself,
But such as gathered colour day by day.”

TENNYSON.

OCCUPIED as I was with many cares, I had not forgotten my resolution of telling Mr. Armstrong the suspicions that had dawned upon my mind while I was at Morfa. I found an opportunity for some talk with him one evening after I had been at home about a fortnight, and I did not spare him any details of my observations, or the conjectures I had formed from them. He listened with more interest than I had ventured to expect; he even cross-questioned me about the Morgans, and made memorandums of the information I had gleaned from them with a gravity

which impressed me with a high sense of my own sagacity. When he had learned everything I could tell him, and pocketed his memorandum-book, he proceeded to destroy my complacency by telling me, that though he should keep the hints I had imparted to him in mind, he did not see the slightest reason to suppose they would lead to any useful discovery. He was sorry, he said, that Hilary and I had conceived such a suspicion, and he strongly advised me to put every trace of it out of my thoughts as quickly as possible.

He helped me to follow the advice he had given by never again alluding in any way to my Morfa visit. Indeed, after that one long talk, many weeks passed without my having an opportunity of exchanging more than a few words at a time with Mr. Armstrong. At first I wondered at the chance which always prevented our falling into one of our consultations over the school work, which had seemed a matter of daily necessity. By degrees it dawned upon me that it could not be chance that kept us apart, and I began to be troubled at the barrier of reserve which seemed suddenly to have sprung up between me and my old ally. I only noticed the change. Mr. Armstrong came to our house regu-

larly, walking with my father to and from the school, and neglecting nothing of his old care of him, and my mother and Nesta counted him as much a friend of the family as ever. They did not seem to perceive that he had ceased to be my special friend, and I would not for the world have let any one suppose that I had noticed a difference in him. I was vexed with myself for being so grieved and pained by the loss of his old kindness, his old special care. I had not known before how much I valued it, or how impossible it had seemed to me that I should ever be without it. I knew that I had really nothing to complain of. I was certain that if I had had any real difficulty in my work for my father, Mr. Armstrong would have been just as ready to help me as ever. I observed even that he did help me in many unobtrusive ways; and yet—there was no use in denying it,—he was gradually withdrawing himself from our intimacy, trying, I felt, to accustom us to do without him.

My father was the only person besides myself who discovered that George Armstrong's visits were shorter than formerly, and that he was less at home, less happy when with us. He comforted himself for the defection of his old pupil, by reminding me

very often that George had much less leisure to give us than formerly, and that we ought not to be exacting towards an old friend. It was true that Mr. Armstrong's time was now very fully occupied. He no longer lived alone; his father had died while I was in Wales, and his mother and young brothers and sisters, who were left by his father's death wholly dependent on him, had come to live with him in London. With so many added cares and responsibilities, we could not reasonably expect him to give as much time and thought to us, as he had once given. So at least my father said, when he checked himself in his old habit of referring to Mr. Armstrong for help or advice in every little difficulty. Was I less reasonable than he, or was it because I knew Mr. Armstrong better, that I was not satisfied with this explanation of the change I saw? I had such confidence in his powers, that I was sure it was not for want of time that he left me to struggle alone through the work we had once shared. I knew he could always find time for everything he wished to do, and that he could have made old duties and new fit into each other if he had chosen. I was convinced he had a better reason for dissolving our partnership, and I do not deny that I troubled

myself with many fears and conjectures about what this reason might be. I shall not write down all the foolish thoughts I allowed to torment me. The very worst of them all—a fear which sometimes haunted me—that he might have fancied I was depending too much on his help, and allowing his friendship to become too important to me, used to vanish every now and then before some unexpected kind look or understanding word, and, in spite of all my after-reasonings, my heart grew light again, and I was restored for a time to my old confidence.

During the autumn months a close intimacy sprang up between our family and Mrs. Armstrong. My mother was naturally anxious to show her every possible attention, and she was one of those people who hold it a chief proof of kindness in their friends to pay them frequent visits. Before winter set in, it had come to be an established custom, the breach of which was considered a terrible grievance, that we should spend with her one or two afternoons in every week. Nesta and my mother found these frequent visits a sad tax on their complaisance. I endured them much more patiently. Mrs. Armstrong's untidy drawing-room, littered as it always was with broken toys, torn lesson-books,



and never-finished needlework, did not look as repulsive to me as I suppose it did to other people. I found myself unaccountably happy there. I could contentedly pass long rainy afternoons in listening to Mrs. Armstrong's monotonous complaints about her weak health and her dislike to living in London; and the uselessness of her attempting to keep the children in any sort of order while George was away. Or I could, with still greater satisfaction, while away the long hours of winter twilight in keeping the children quiet with whispered fairy tales when Mrs. Armstrong slept on the sofa. I was proud of being the only person but one who had sufficient influence with these ill-trained children to induce them to pass an afternoon without quarrelling.

I did not take myself very seriously to task to discover why these apparently uninviting employments had such a charm for me; but I was far more scrupulous than Nesta and my mother in going away before I ceased to be wanted. It never happened to me that Mr. Armstrong returned from his chambers before I left the house, whereas they, who spent comparatively few afternoons there, were always meeting him, and seemed to receive more than their

just share of his thanks and gratitude. It was certainly extremely unreasonable in me to envy them these thanks, seeing that I took such especial care never to be in the way of hearing them. If I were to be severe in chronicling my own changing moods at that time, I should have to convict myself of much unreasonableness and inconsistency; but, seeing they were soon to pass away and leave no trace of the pain they gave, I will say nothing about them, but hasten on to the history of a day in my life to which all those misty days were slowly leading me up, little as I thought it,—a day that has coloured with its happiness the recollection of every one that came before, and the passing of every one that followed. It came unexpectedly, for we seldom know when a page in our book of life is going to be turned. The dark page is folded down over the bright one, and the golden-lettered leaf takes the place of the dark before we think we have half done reading the page.

I came down stairs on that January morning, I remember, with my day's work very carefully mapped out, and I thought I could have foretold quite certainly all that would happen to me before I went to bed. I was so busy, that I was a little annoyed when I

was interrupted in my writing, by a note from Mrs. Armstrong, asking me to come and spend the day with her. She had a headache; the children were disposed to be unruly, and it was too cold to send them to spend their spirits out of doors. My mother wanted me to refuse the invitation. She thought the sky looked as if a fall of snow were impending, and she was vexed with Mrs. Armstrong for expecting me to brave weather to which she would not expose her own children. My father, who overheard our discussion, said that he thought this a foolish cause of offence. If I were really not afraid of the cold, and if Mrs. Armstrong wanted me, I had better go. I was glad he decided the matter for me. I had repented my exclamation of annoyance the instant after I had uttered it; and though I did not like to contradict myself, I should really have been much disappointed if I had had to send away Mrs. Armstrong's servant, and sit down to my desk again. So the first plan of my day was broken; but as I faced the north wind on my way to Mrs. Armstrong's house, I could just as easily have arranged a second. I again thought I saw how the hours would pass. I should, with more or less success, struggle through the morning lessons, then would come the tumultuous

dinner-hour; then for an hour or so I should have to exert myself vigorously to invent amusements for the girls, and keep peace among the boys; in the twilight they would probably listen to a story, and by six o'clock I should be walking wearily home. Such was the usual routine of a day at the Armstrong's; it was strange that I did not by any means dislike such days. The snow began to fall as I reached the house, and it continued to descend in large slow flakes all day. I think there is something exhilarating in a snow storm; it always has a happy effect on my spirits, and I noticed that the children were all unusually amiable that morning. I tolerated a good deal of running backwards and forwards to the window to watch the snow during lessons; and we came to such a mutual good understanding in consequence, that I had my own way about choosing quiet amusements for the afternoon. Rather earlier than usual I persuaded them to pronounce it blind-man's holiday, and to gather round the fire for a long story-telling. With a child on my knee, and a circle of eager young faces round me, I could always spin stories for an unlimited time. The little Armstrongs were good listeners, and my fame as a story teller had long been established among

them. We were fairly embarked on the history of the "Fair One with Golden Locks," when a knock at the front door made me start so violently that little Mary Armstrong, who was sitting on my knees, complained that I nearly let her fall.

"What is the matter?" they all exclaimed. "Do go on, it is only George; he promised to come home early to-day, because it is Mary's birthday. But, of course, you will not interrupt the tale for him. He says you have often told him stories."

"Now has she not, George?" I heard little Mary say, who slipped out into the hall to welcome her brother. "Come in, do, and make Miss Scott go on."

I saw at once that there was no escape for me. The children received the new-comer with tumultuous joy into the fire-lit circle. Mary deserted my knee for his, and there was a little dispute about places, each of the children being anxious to be nearest him; but when every one was settled, there came a pause, and I had to go on with my tale—at first rather hesitatingly, but after a time I took courage. My new listener sat with his eyes rather moodily fixed on the fire; he did not seem to attend much to what I was saying. He stroked little Mary's hair every now and then gently with his hand, and always had



a cheerful word when he was appealed to; but it struck me that he was too much occupied with thoughts of his own, to have much interest to spare for the Fair One's fortunes.

I got up once to go home, but was ordered decidedly to sit down again. It was not nearly six o'clock; I should have due notice when it was time to go; and, besides, I must wait till the snow ceased; so I had to ramble on till my stock of fairy lore was almost exhausted. Mr. Armstrong's attention must have been arrested by the last tales I told, for when the children, weary at length of sitting still, broke up the circle and dispersed to seek other amusements in the room, he surprised me by making a remark upon them.

“How can you remember so many strange stories?” he said, abruptly. “What charm have they for you? They seem to me to be all very much alike. The one point of interest is the mystery. Your Fair Ones and your Princes are always changing their forms, and seeming something that they are not. I suppose they would not be interesting if they were always the same.”

I don't know why the tone of this remark annoyed me, but it did, and I answered it with needless

energy. "You have misunderstood my stories completely," I said. "Their charm to me and to the children, who are far wiser than you, does not lie in their mystery, nor in the changes, but in the constancy that survives all the transformations. My Fair Ones and Princes never change to each other. They may be beggars or queens, or fawns, or blue birds to the rest of the world, but to their friends they are always the same. That is why the children and I like them, is it not, little Mary?"

Little Mary at this instant ran up to me, and tried to draw my attention to a toy she held in her hand. Mr. Armstrong rather eagerly drew her back.

"No, not just now, little Mary; don't interrupt us just now." Then turning to me—how grave the tone of his voice was!—"You must not put it into little Mary's head, or get it into your own," he said, "that only in fairy tales there can be people who are always the same to their friends. The difference between real life and fairy-land is, that in reality duties change, and that the expression of feeling may often have to be repressed by a loyal regard to what is most right. Can you not understand that?"

"Yes, but—"

"Little Mary wants me to look at her doll."

"Never mind little Mary, finish your sentence."

"Well, then, I do not think that duty can ever require such a change of conduct as to make real friends misunderstand or distrust each other. True friends will enter into each other's ideas of duty, if they are explained to them. They ought to be explained. You see it is I who do not approve of mysteries."

I was vexed to find the tears starting to my eyes as I finished. To hide them and prevent further conversation, I turned resolutely to Mary, and occupied myself with her and her doll till it was time for me to get ready to return home. Then I escaped from the room without taking leave of any one. I longed to be at home again. I was angry with myself for having been betrayed into speaking so earnestly, for having been so ridiculously moved by my own words. I hardly dared to recollect what I had said. I must wait to take myself to task till I was alone at home.

When I came down stairs I found Mr. Armstrong waiting in the hall to walk home with me. He made me take his arm when we had got into the street. The snow had ceased falling, and the streets were white and noiseless as London streets only are for the first

half-hour after a snow-storm. We walked on for some time in perfect silence. At length, to break the spell, and assure myself that I had full command of my voice, I ventured some commonplace remark on the strange silence of the streets. It was provoking that my voice would sound so shy and timid, as if I were speaking to a stranger instead of an old friend. What had come to me? I don't think Mr. Armstrong heard what I said; at all events, my remark received a very irrelevant reply.

“Janet,” he said suddenly, “I want you to explain what you said just now about friends understanding each other.”

“I said all I had to say,” I managed to gasp out.

“Then I must word my question differently. Janet, have you misunderstood me? Does it concern you to understand me? Give me just one word for answer, for if it does, you shall never have cause to make that complaint again. You shall know all my heart.”

I don't think I said anything—perhaps my face spoke plainly enough. At all events, my silence was rightly interpreted.

After a short pause Mr. Armstrong went on. He had much to say, and how wonderful it was to me to

hear it! Could it be all true?—or was I walking through the silent, snowy, lamp-lit streets in a dream? I heard the story of my life for the last three years told in a way that transfigured it for me. I had all that time been richer and happier than I knew; he had been interesting himself about me, watching me, approving me, blaming me, pitying me, at last loving me with a love that had become an inseparable part of his life, that underlaid, he said, every thought and every feeling, and entered into every project. He had always meant to tell me of it as soon as he thought I should care to hear; but he had gone on from month to month, fancying me too busy with my work, too full of anxiety about my father and Nesta to have a thought to spare for him. Just before I left home in the summer, he had hoped that the time had come when he might speak, but he had been kept back from doing so by a doubt about his future prospects which then first began to trouble him. Difficulties had increased around him since then. Since his father's death, he had often thought that, having been silent so long, it had become his duty to be silent always. He could only now ask me to share a very uncertain and cloudy future. As long as he believed I did not care for him

he had thought it right to withdraw himself gradually from me, only he had watched, hoping, he confessed, for some sign that I *did* care. His hope had nearly, very nearly, died out—my chance words that night had suddenly revived it. Was I prepared, he asked, at last, to face all the consequences of my words? Could I promise never to regret the explanation they had brought upon me?"

I don't remember what I said in answer; it was not much. How could I say much, when my happiness was still so strange to me that I could not take it in? It satisfied him, however, and then the walk was over. We parted on the doorstep; I would not let him enter the house. I must be alone to think it all over, to try to realize it. I saw the door open, and the light from the hall showed me his face for a moment, radiant and tender, as I had never seen it before; then I watched him down the white street, and then the door shut behind me, and I thought I had awokened from a dream. No, it was not a dream, it was a reality—the great reality of my life that had come to me! How pale all the shadows with which I had loved to surround myself looked beside it!

CHAPTER XV.

“ Blind ! blind ! blind !
Oh ! sitting in the dark for evermore,
And doing nothing ; putting out a hand
To feel what lies about me, and to say,
Not, ‘This is blue or red,’ but ‘This is cold ;’
And ‘This the sun is shining on,’ and this
‘I know not till they tell its name to me.’ ”

JEAN INGELOW.

A MONTH passed, and my engagement with George Armstrong ceased to interest very much any one but ourselves. My father and mother were quietly content with it, Nesta sympathized kindly in our happiness, Hilary wrote his congratulations on my good fortune in terms which almost satisfied me, and then there was nothing more to be said. It was our own affair that the fulfilment of our promise to each other was an event only to be looked at through a long vista of years. It did not dismay either of us

that it should be so. We could thankfully take the great good which our engagement brought us, by giving us full understanding of and perfect trust in each other, and added opportunities of mutual help. What other good the coming years would bring we could wait for patiently, knowing that whatever troubles came upon us meanwhile, we should bear them together.

The very first weeks of our engagement brought us other things than our own happiness to think about. Nesta suffered much in health from the cold weather which set in after that December snow-storm. I had thought her looking unwell for some days, when one morning Hilary's usual weekly letter to our mother was accompanied by a Welsh county newspaper, addressed to me. I was engaged reading a letter to my father, and Nesta opened it first. She just glanced down a page, and put it aside. I did not notice any change in her countenance; all day long she seemed unusually busy, but I observed a feverish spot on each cheek and an unnatural brightness in her eyes that alarmed me. In the evening I recollect the newspaper, and on examining it, found a passage which Hilary had marked with great red lines. It announced the approaching marriage of Miss Lester,

heiress of Morfa Mawr, with Shafto Carr, Esq., nephew of the Earl of Denbigh. The newspaper informed its readers that Miss Lester was now travelling abroad with her future mother-in-law, Lady Helen Carr. In consequence of Mr. Lester's infirm state of health, the marriage was to be celebrated at Venice, and would take place in the spring. I, too, put the newspaper aside, without any remarks upon what I had read. I could not make up my mind whether to believe the report or not. It might be unfounded, and yet I felt sure Hilary would not have sent the newspaper to me unless he had seen reason to believe it true. I was anxious that Nesta should not ask my opinion, and she did not. She never made the slightest allusion to the Welsh news, and after some days I began to hope that the paragraph had escaped her observation. She did not appear at all more unhappy than usual. She talked a little more, and seemed eager to take more than her share of every employment that chanced to be going on. We were surprised sometimes at the amount of work she got through in a day. After the frost set in, however, a change came over her; she took a slight cold, and was confined to her room for a few days, and the

interruption in her usual habits produced an effect she seemed unable to overcome. An extreme languor and weariness took possession of her. Every day it appeared to be a greater effort to her to rise. She had no longer any interest in what was passing in the house. She would sit for hours and hours, doing nothing, listening to nothing: she no longer started when the postman's knock came at the door; her anxiety about letters was over at last. If, in the hope of rousing her, I mentioned Shafto's name, she would turn her head away languidly, wearily. Her face seldom showed any change of expression, only sometimes, when she had been sitting a long time quiet with her eyes closed, and thought no one was near, a tear would ooze slowly from under her transparent eyelids, and roll unheeded down her cheek. When we entreated her, for our sakes not to give way to her grief, she seemed surprised. She did not think, she said, that she *was* repining or cherishing useless regrets. She felt more resigned, less rebellious and impatient, than she had once been; she was only now so very tired.

The doctor, whom we had called in when she first fell ill, began to look grave when days and weeks passed and his remedies were of no avail. His patient

was suffering from no illness that he could discover, he assured us; but there was an utter failure of strength that puzzled him. She seemed to be letting life slip away from her, from mere want of will to keep it. He talked of change of air and scene, and earnestly recommended that she should be removed to a warmer climate for the spring months. We were all distressed by these suggestions, because we knew how impossible it was for us to carry them into effect; but Nesta heard them with extreme impatience. "Don't let any one speak to me again about leaving England," she entreated, one day; "it is just *the* thing I cannot bear. I used to think so much about it a short time ago, I was always seeing the bright sunshine, and strange cities and scenery, and those three—moving about among them, laughing and talking and basking in the sunshine, so happy, while I was shut out—and it used to be such torture to me. Now I am quiet, I never wish to stir from here again. I have left all that old pain and struggle behind me; don't let any one bring it back. I only want you to leave me alone, and not take any notice of me." It was a hard task she imposed upon us, but she was right. I believe it was fortunate for her that we were not able to

force any great change or exertion upon her just then. She had a quiet time, in which, unseen by us, a work of healing and renovation went on. Those hours of uneasiness and weakness were not lost. In her utter dejection and helplessness, feeling the failure and insufficiency of all earthly love, she threw herself on the only love in which the heart can ever find rest. When the torpor of grief had passed, she awoke to a higher spiritual life than she had ever known before. The change was very gradual, but we all felt it. Gentle, affectionate as ever, there was, after her recovery from that winter's tedious illness, a calm about her, a dignity that impressed every one who came near her with a wonderful sense of repose. She was no longer the timid girl who could be pained or frightened by a word of blame or a cold look; nor did she seem, as formerly, always trembling under the apprehension of some great possible calamity. Her gentle eyes had the steadfast expression of one who had looked so closely at sorrow and disappointment, that for her they had lost all their strangeness and terror. No one knew better than she from that time how to enter into every phase of another person's grief; no one ever more utterly laid aside all self-pitying reference to her own.

So strengthened and purified, Nesta rose above the shadow of her grief; but it is not often so. Many a nature is dwarfed and embittered for life by such an ordeal as she passed through; the frost of sorrow strikes so deep into the heart that it never has power to unfold itself rightly again in this world.

What a contrast there seemed at that time between Nesta's lot and my own! I remembered when she was a child she had *feared* to be better off than me —to have anything that I had not; and I was angry with myself sometimes, because in looking at my own secret source of joy, I could not help being happy.

Yet I wanted all the strength my inward content gave me; my father and mother looked solely to me now for support, and if my spirits had failed, I don't know how we should have got through the dark days of that winter. Nesta was not the only invalid in the house. My father suffered much from increased pain and inflammation in his eyes. He had tried them severely during the autumn term, and had now to pay the penalty. He spoke more openly of his own sufferings and of his dread of losing his eyesight, than he had hitherto done, and my mother, shaken out of her false security, by his unwonted complaints,

was overwhelmed with apprehension and self-reproach for past want of care. She and I changed places then, for I was disposed to be more hopeful than usual.

Comparing my father's account of his own sensations with the instructions Dr. Allison had left for our guidance, I even found encouragement to believe that his present symptoms were rather favourable than otherwise. George Armstrong agreed with me that they indicated the approach of a crisis in the disease, and after much persuasion, he prevailed on my father to consult an oculist to whom Dr. Allison had recommended him to have recourse, should his remedies fail. My mother, afraid of having her worst apprehensions confirmed, was disposed to encourage my father in putting off the consultation from week to week. I don't think the day for it would ever have been fixed had not George been very determined on carrying the point. He brought the doctor himself, rather unexpectedly, one morning, the very morning, I remember, on which we received a letter from Charlie, saying that he was to go in for his degree examination the following day. We had been discussing the tone of this letter so earnestly during breakfast, that the prospect of the doctor's visit had passed out of our minds.

As we were leaving the breakfast table, George came in to say that Dr. M—— was in the drawing-room, waiting to see my father. He got up, and followed George without a word; but when he reached the door, he turned, and stood for a moment, looking back at the room and at us. He had been able to see more distinctly since the pain in his eyes had returned, and there was just then a soft ray of winter sunshine streaming through the window upon my mother's face and figure as she sat at the head of the table. It was a distinct and not unpleasing picture that he took in then, of us, and of the scene of our old family life, one, he says, that it is not painful to keep and look at inwardly. My mother became very faint as she listened to my father's step mounting the stairs. In a few minutes we should know the worst, but the few minutes were like hours.

At last the drawing-room door opened, and we heard Mr. Armstrong and Dr. M—— coming down stairs; they were talking, and the first tone of George's voice reassured me. I knew at once that he could not be bringing us the worst news. Dr. M—— came himself to speak to my mother; he approved of Dr. Allison's treatment, but thought the

case ought to have been more closely watched. It might be that a favourable change was taking place, and with that hope he had determined on trying certain powerful remedies, which had been known to succeed in worse cases. He warned us against being too sanguine, but he seemed equally anxious that my father should have enough hope to make him willing to give the treatment a fair trial. Dr. M—— said my father must submit to be very quiet, and sit constantly in a darkened room for many weeks, and he instructed us to do our utmost to keep him amused, and as free as possible from anxiety of mind.

I readily promised everything. It was so delightful to me to have again even a faint hope of my father's recovery, that I was disposed to put the best possible construction on each of the doctor's kind words.

My mother was easily persuaded to think as I did. Even my father listened with more belief than I had expected to my joyful anticipations ; he would not allow in so many words that he expected any great good to come from the new treatment, but he submitted without a murmur to do all Dr. M—— required, and was sometimes even the first to remember his cautions. As he and I sat together for the next

four days in the darkened drawing-room, I fell into a more hopeful way of speaking to him about the future than I should have ventured upon a few months, or even two years ago.

I planned that Charlie should take a sufficiently high honour to justify the trustees of the school in appointing him my father's substitute for a year or so. During that time, I said, my father would be gradually recovering his eyesight, till at length he should be able to resume his old position, and set Charlie free to follow some more congenial occupation. Once or twice I went so far as to map out the successful future of Charlie's life, which was to compensate him for the sacrifice of those two first years.

As one day after another passed in this kind of talk, I sometimes asked myself whether I was not rather exceeding Dr. M——'s instructions. My father grew restless, and watched the alternations of his symptoms with feverish anxiety. I began to think I had not taken the best means of securing calm of mind when I persuaded him to exchange the patient endurance to which he had been long accustomed for an uncertain hope. George comforted me by observing that, since this week of Charlie's examination must be an anxious time, it

might be well to divert my father's thoughts from wondering hour by hour how Charlie was faring at Cambridge.

About a fortnight passed in this way. My father did not seem to make progress, and he suffered much ; he began to worry about having to neglect his work in the school, and one or two complaints of mismanagement reached him, and increased his trouble. My mother and I counted the days that must elapse before Charlie could arrive in London, and I wrote to ask him to come to us as soon as possible, knowing how much his presence would cheer my father. I was disappointed that he did not return home as soon as the examination was over, without waiting till the degrees were given, but I comforted myself by reflecting that it was like Charlie to wish to bring the news of his own triumph. I thought his determination to stay till the last, indicated that he anticipated a great success.

At length a letter came from Charlie. How strangely my heart sank when it was put into my hand ! I had no reason for feeling alarmed. It might just as well have been good news as bad, and yet, somehow, I knew that it was bad as soon as my fingers touched the thin envelope, and my pale face frightened

my mother and Nesta, before my swimming eyes would let me read :—

“DEAR JANET,”—(The words grew at last clear to me), “I enclose the class-list, where my name is not ; that means I am plucked. My father will hardly believe unless he sees ; I am not sure that I do ; but I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence. I am utterly sick of it all.

“CHARLIE.”

“P.S. Don’t expect me till you see me. I cannot face my father yet.”

That was all. There was no class-list in the envelope—the poor boy had forgotten to put it in ; and the paper on which these words were scrawled was blotted and crumpled as if it had been once crushed together in his hand. It pained me to see this, but it was the postscript of the letter that grieved my mother most, far more than the news itself. If he had come home to her in his humiliation and trouble, she would have been so full of the thought of excusing and consoling him that she would have had no room in her heart for any other. My father’s first words were (he was silent for some time after I read the letter to him)—“When can he be here ?” and he

made me sit down at once and write at his dictation a kind letter, entreating him to come. It was almost too kind a letter, I thought as I wrote (being much troubled all the time to keep my eyes free enough from tears for my task); its tenderness and generosity would almost have broken my heart, if I had received it from any one I had disappointed as deeply as Charlie had disappointed my father. I wondered how he would feel as he read. Surely he would come at once, and not be above showing us the remorse he must be feeling. My father wanted my mother to add a postscript, but she was disinclined to do so. She resented the tone of Charlie's letter more than my father did.

He might have acknowledged that he was sorry, she said; and it was so wrong of him not to come home. Hilary would never have acted so. She promised not to scold him when he came, but she said she would always feel hurt about it.

When I returned from posting the letter, I found my father indisposed for conversation. He sat very still all day, hardly moving or speaking. He made me read aloud to him, and prevailed on me to undo a fold of the shutter that I might see without straining my eyes. It was a sunny day, but though I had

many qualms of conscience about disobeying Dr. M——'s express orders, I thought it better to run some risk than to force my father to sit unoccupied, revolving sad thoughts in his mind. We spent the next and the three following days in expecting Charlie. We thought every knock at the door was his, we watched every post in the hope that it would bring a letter. During those days I read diligently hour after hour to my father. It was some volume of early ecclesiastical history we were engaged upon. When by chance I hear the name of one of the bishops or saints whose lives we read then, something of the wretched, bewildered feeling of that time comes back to me. I used to place my father's chair as far as possible from the dusty stream of sunshine I was obliged to let in upon my book; but I could never make his corner as dark as I wished. Those were such dreadfully sunny days; I have never known February days so unnecessarily bright since then. My father sat always with his eyes wide open and fixed, and a frown of intense attention on his forehead. It saddened me more than any expression of pain I had ever seen on any face, for it showed how much he feared to let his thoughts follow their own course an instant. I did not myself share his extreme un-

easiness at Charlie's non-appearance. I thought it very like Charlie to put off writing or coming as long as possible. It would cost him an effort to do either. It was like him to let hours and days slip on unheeded, while he was gathering up courage to make it.

At the end of a week, two letters from Cambridge—one having been misdirected, and so delayed a day—reached us together. They were in a strange hand, and proved to be from a college friend of Charlie's. The first, written with an evident wish not to alarm, informed us that Charlie had been for some days very unwell. Within the last twelve hours, the writer of the letter said, his illness had taken a more serious form. He had persuaded Charlie to send for a doctor, and after hearing the opinion of the medical man, he thought it right to inform Charlie's friends of his state. He was suffering much pain in his head, and the doctor seemed to apprehend an attack of brain-fever. The next letter was short and urgent. Charlie was alarmingly ill; he did not know any one round him; he imagined himself at home and asked incessantly for his father, whom he believed to be at hand, but unwilling to see him. The doctor attending him thought it important that some of his

friends should come to him as soon as possible. The writer urged Mr. Scott to set off immediately on receipt of the letter. He was doing all he could for his friend, he said, but he felt his care insufficient, and was anxious to resign his charge into better hands.

My mother always showed admirable presence of mind when she was called upon to act in a sudden emergency. In the presence of illness or trouble, her ordinary indecision and over-care about trifles left her at once. She showed more resolution on that sad morning than Nesta and I did. Before I had finished reading the letters she had determined what to do. She and Mr. Armstrong must start immediately for Cambridge, and she decided that my father must be persuaded to stay at home. He would be of little use in nursing, and it would be a terrible risk for him to take such a journey now. I knew that it would not be a risk at all; it would be a certain throwing away of his last chance of saving his eyesight, and yet I felt little hope that we should succeed in keeping him at home. George came in while we were still discussing which of us should undertake the task of breaking the news to our father. He agreed with my mother in thinking that my

father must be persuaded, almost compelled, to stay at home ; and seeing how very much I dreaded reading these letters to him, he took the task upon himself, and went alone to the drawing-room. He was the right person to do it ; no one could be so firm, and at the same time so kind as he. My mother and Nesta went up stairs to prepare for the hasty journey. I lingered with a beating heart outside the drawing-room door, anxious to catch some tone of my father's voice which might show me how he bore the news. I feared so much that he would resent our effort to keep him from Charlie, that I was as much surprised as relieved when George came out of the room with a satisfied face, and said. " He bears it much better than I expected, he has promised me that he will not run any risk. He wants you to go to him now. You need not be afraid ; he is wonderfully calm."

Somehow, this last assurance *made* me afraid, and the eager, rather excited tone in which my father called to me the instant I opened the door, did not reassure me.

" Janet, come here," he said. " What sort of a morning is it ? "

" A bright sunny morning," I answered.

"Then dear, you must do something for me. Open all the shutters quite wide, and let in the sunshine."

I hesitated a little, and then, understanding suddenly the motive of his request, I walked across the room and let in the full light of a sunshiny spring morning.

"Are the shutters open?" my father asked.

"Yes, wide open," I answered tremblingly.

Putting his hands before him with an uncertain movement I had never seen before, my father walked forward till he stood opposite the window. The light fell full upon his wide-opened eyes, and I felt sure, from their fixed, unshrinking expression, that they were now entirely sightless.

"Come and stand between me and the light, Jenny."

I obeyed.

"You are there?"

"Yes, close to you, dearest papa," I said.

He put out his hand, but did not at first succeed in placing it on my head.

"Yes, you are there; but, Janet, my child, I cannot see you. It is as I expected—I am *quite* blind. I cannot even see the light. I have suspected

for the last week that it would be so ; now I know. God's will be done ! "

I came close to him, and threw my arms round his neck, and we stood for a minute or two silent together. He had often told me that it would be to him the hardest trial of all to give up the last glimmer of light. He prized such dim vision as he had lately had far more than most people do their perfect sight. The prospect of changing that for total darkness had been very terrible to him. The dreaded moment had come now, and he met it with a calm, almost triumphant smile on his face.

" We have no time to lose, Janet," he said. " You see it will be *no risk*. Nothing can change my lot now. I am thankful that it is so, for now I may go to Charlie. It would not have been right to go if there had been a lingering hope left. How strange that I should be able to say, I am glad there is not ! You had better tell your mother and Nesta the whole truth ; it will set their minds at rest. All our thoughts may now be given to Charlie. I need never be an anxiety to you again. You know the worst. What a blessing ! Yes, I am in earnest, Janet. A great calm comes when a long uncertain hope is fairly given up. That knowledge has come

to me this morning. Now go, darling ; your mother must not be delayed a moment by my resolution to accompany her. See what arrangements can be made for my journey. I don't think I need be a trouble to any one. I shall not be much more helpless than I used to be, and George knows how to take care of me."

Something of the calmness of which my father spoke fell upon me as I listened to him and looked at his face. The moment so long dreaded had come, and it had not proved terrible. Instead of sinking, my heart grew lighter. I felt as if it would be presumptuous ever to dread anything for him again, or for ourselves, while he was left to show us how to bear whatever came.

I had some difficulty in reconciling my mother to my father's taking the journey. She could not bring herself to acknowledge that hope for him was indeed over. Her mind refused to take in at once two such calamities as this morning had brought us. However, the necessity for exertion helped her to keep calm. There was not much time for discussion. My father would not allow the journey to be delayed a moment longer than was absolutely necessary. In less than two hours after that morning's post came in,

Nesta and I found ourselves for the first time alone in the house. How very, very long the rest of that day seemed ! How strangely empty the house looked without my mother's figure moving about it ! We should have felt still more depressed if we had known that sudden departure was a final one ; that the old life in the home of our childhood had come to an end that day.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ Star after star arose and fell, but I
Lay sundered from the moving Universe ;
Nor knew what eye was on me, nor the hand
That nursed me, more than infants in their sleep.”

TENNYSON’s *Princess*.

THE first gleam of comfort that came to Nesta and me was the return of George Armstrong in the evening, bringing us news of Charlie and of our father and mother. It was a great relief to hear that my mother’s courage had not given way, and that my father had continued calm during the journey.

George had accompanied them to Charlie’s rooms in the college, and seen them established there. He had not been allowed to see Charlie, but he had spoken to his friend and to the physician who was attending him. The doctor had arrived for his second daily visit just as George was leaving, and had seemed much relieved to find my father and

mother with his patient. Since the fever became violent, Charlie's wandering mind had fixed itself on the idea that he was deserted by all his friends, especially by his father, whom he believed himself to have offended or injured in some way. The doctor hoped that the sight of familiar faces would have a calming effect on his mind.

It interested me to learn from George that the friend who had written to us, and who had been very constant in his attention to Charlie since his illness began, was a certain cousin of Richard Moorsom's, whom Charlie, in his giddy days, had been much disposed to ridicule. He had written an account of Charlie's illness to his friends at Deepdale, and on that morning Mr. Moorsom had arrived at Cambridge to see if he could be of any use in looking after the invalid. My father and mother had found him in Charlie's room, and they seemed, George thought, to have made a friend of him at once. George had heard him say that he should not leave Cambridge till Charlie was out of danger. I could not help looking at Nesta as he said this, but she did not seem to hear. Once the mention of Richard Moorsom's name would have moved her, if it were only that it brought back the recollection of our summer

at Broadlands. Now she heard it with as much indifference as if it were an utterly strange name ; and he, good faithful heart, was nursing Charlie, and devoting himself to our father and mother for her sake.

Now again, for some weeks, the entire interest of our days centred in the arrival of the morning and afternoon posts, which never failed to bring us a few lines from my mother. As they were hopeful or desponding, our days were sad or cheerful.

“ At last Charlie has fallen asleep,” she wrote, the fourth day after she left us, and I may take a large sheet of paper, and give you a fuller account than I have yet done. It is a great blessing that your father came. If dear Charlie is spared, I shall always say that his coming saved his life. He is never quiet—never for one instant—unless your father is near. Your father is sitting by his bedside now, holding his hand while he sleeps. He does not know me, poor fellow, and I don’t think he even quite knows his father ; but then your father’s voice has a power of calming him that nothing else has. He seems to have a dim idea that it is some one he ought to obey, and that by doing as he is told, he shall please his father, whom he still will believe to

be far away, and very angry with him. It is sad to hear him, poor boy. Sometimes he sings songs and talks as if he were in gay company, and then a sort of horror comes over him, and he says terrible things about himself. He must have been very unhappy for a long time. To please your father and gratify Richard Moorsom—who, I must tell you, is as attentive as a son to us—I have been lying down for a little time on the sofa in Charlie's sitting-room. I could not sleep, so I soon got up and began to try to set the room in order. It disheartened me sadly to see what a state it was in. I am sure, poor fellow, no wonder he could not study while his room was in such terrible confusion. Books and clothes and papers, and all sorts of strange-looking things heaped up together on every chair. Many of the letters on the table are unopened ; I am afraid most of them look like bills. I dare not begin to examine them. I have collected them all, and put them in a drawer. I will let you know by the morning post how Charlie is when he wakes. He has never been quiet for so long yet."

The next reports were not favourable. Charlie had an increase of fever, which was followed by another still longer interval of stupor. Life or death

hung on how he would wake from that death-like sleep.

In the short notes my mother wrote on those heavy days were one or two allusions to my father, which showed me that her mind was only gradually awaking to a knowledge of his actual condition. "Your father seems better," she wrote, "and has never once complained of pain in his eyes since he left London. I had a terrible fright yesterday. I had moved a table, with some medicine bottles and glasses on it, from Charlie's bedside to the middle of the room, and your father, coming in from the outer room, stumbled and nearly fell down over it. Mr. Moorsom happened to be near and caught him, or he would have had a very bad fall. The room was quite light at the time. I had just opened one of the windows. I don't think such a thing ever happened to your father before, and I confess it was a great shock to me. He has been so helpful hitherto, that I really did not know he was in any danger. Now I shall never have peace of mind when he is out of my sight. Ah, dear girls, how thankless we are all our lives for common blessings! It seems to me now that if your dear father could but have his eyesight like other people, and if Charlie were spared to us, I could never worry

myself about trifles again. Yet I used to do this. I even allowed trifling household cares to occupy me so much, that I did not notice your father's state of health as much as I might have done. Janet, you have nothing to reproach yourself with—*you* have always been careful over your father. It is curious that you, who were always called the thoughtless one of the family, you whom I used to say I could not trust with the smallest charge, should, in this great matter, have shown yourself the most trustworthy of us all—you and George. Give my love to George, and tell him that I have never been half grateful enough for his kindness to your father. Mr. Moorsom is also very kind. He walks out with your father every day. I wish I had more time to talk to him. He must find it dreary work, sitting hour after hour in the outer room, waiting to see if there is anything to be done for us, while we are with Charlie. How fond he must have been of Charlie, to take this trouble for him!"

At length, on the second of April, the first really spring-like day that year, a day of soft sunshine and gentle showers, came a hopeful happy letter. The relief it brought showed us how terrible had been our fears. The first sentences were almost incoherent in

their joy; then my mother sobered down into her usual style of minute narrative:—

“It was at nine o'clock this morning,” she wrote, “that Charlie awoke from his long sleep, and now it is four. I am sorry to think that you will have to be unhappy a whole day longer than I am. Your father and I are so happy!—your father even more than I. I shall never forget how he looked when Charlie put out his hand, and called him. ‘Is that you, father? is that really you?’ His voice was very weak, and he tried to raise himself from the pillow, but could not. Your father came to sit upon the bed, and put his arm round Charlie and kissed him, and then Charlie lay back quietly, and looked at your father as if it were a wonder and satisfaction to him that he should be there. Since morning he has had several intervals of troubled sleep. On first waking, he has once or twice seemed frightened, as if he did not know where he was or what had happened; but the sight of your father's face always calmed him immediately. His doctor, who has called twice to-day, says that it is a most Providential thing that your father was able to come. He thinks it has saved Charlie's life.”

At the end of a fortnight Charlie was well enough

to be moved into the outer room. We were beginning to think we should soon have him at home again, when we heard that he had been thrown back into a state of extreme depression and weakness by the shock he felt when the knowledge of our father's total loss of sight first came upon him. My mother had been extremely anxious to withdraw his attention from my father's condition, and Charlie had been too full of his own feelings to be a very careful observer. But, on the third day of his leaving his bedroom, a slight accident revealed the truth to him. He had been more unprepared for it than we, and he took it more to heart. It preyed upon his mind, adding to his already deep remorse, and seriously retarding his recovery. It was pitiful, my mother wrote, to see how Charlie used to lie on his sofa, watching my father fixedly hour after hour, and how every gesture or movement that betrayed his blindness deepened the expression of pain on Charlie's face. My father never knew anything of these sad looks ; he used to go on talking cheerfully, boasting perhaps a little each day of some new power of helpfulness that he had gained, while Charlie looked on and listened, without ever venturing on a word of condolence or sympathy. He never asked a

single question, or heard how the change in my father had come about. He seemed to prefer gathering his knowledge little by little, as the events of the day brought the painful truth before him. He told me afterwards that he felt it would be a mere mockery in him to speak of his sorrow, or to offer sympathy which by his own folly he had rendered unavailing. He had cast away the chance of giving substantial help to our father in his affliction, and he could not ask him to accept empty words. It was best to bear the weight of his own remorse and pain in silence.

I thought it a sign of a hopeful change in Charlie's character that he did not, as he would once have done, exhaust all his penitence in words ; that he allowed it to remain unexpressed in his heart, till the fruits of an altered life could testify to its sincerity.

When my mother had less to tell us about Charlie—for one day very much resembled another in his tedious recovery—her letters began to be full of Mr. Moorsom's sayings and doings. I was alarmed when I saw how completely his attentions to our father had won my mother's heart, for I could not help guessing the direction her hopes were taking. I feared, too, from little admissions that escaped her,

that she had allowed Mr. Moorsom's evident interest to tempt her to speak more freely about our home concerns than was quite advisable. Prescriptions for medicines of all kinds came from Lady Moorsom to Nesta, and I felt tolerably sure that with an account of her failing health, my mother had also given the entire history of her engagement and rupture with Shafto Carr, and that it was by this time known to every member of the Moorsom family. I was sorry, but I dared not remonstrate, for I knew that my letters were always read aloud by my mother to my father as soon as they arrived, and Mr. Moorsom was just as likely as not to be one of the audience.

By the end of April, change of air was recommended for Charlie. He was not strong enough to bear a long journey, and my father seemed to have a sort of shrinking from returning home. So when Richard Moorsom proposed that they should all visit Deepdale, the invitation was gladly accepted.

Charlie's spirits improved from the day they left Cambridge, and my mother was able to give us brilliant accounts of the happy manner in which their days at Deepdale passed; she enjoying the sweet country scenes, and the sight of Charlie's daily

progress to recovery, though there were times, she said, when many anxious thoughts about the future would come over her. My father did not seem to be in the least anxious, and was quite at home in the society of his kind-hearted host. He walked about the fields leaning on Sir John's arm, listening to his agricultural talk, and astonishing him by bringing out, at every pause, curious information respecting ancient methods of farming, which gave Sir John an opportunity of chuckling over the superiority of his own, and raised his admiration for his guest's learning to the highest possible degree. Lady Moorsom had ample and delightful occupation in doctoring Charlie, and managing my mother. I gathered that the chief topics of their discourse, when housekeeping interests failed, were the bad qualities inherent in the Carr family, and the merits of Lady Moorsom's son Richard. I could see plainly that my mother had readily adopted her hostess's opinion on both these subjects.

When they had been a week at Deepdale, I received a letter dictated by my father, which explained to me why he had preferred visiting Deepdale to returning home.

By the same post that brought my letter, he had,

he told me, written to the trustees, to resign his head-mastership of the school. He thought it right that this necessary step should be taken at once, and he felt he could do it most easily while he was away from the scene of his old labours. All hope of Charlie's appointment was at an end ; but, my father assured me that, now the time had come when he must give up his only means of providing for his family, he felt far less anxious than he had done while he was struggling to keep it. He hoped we should all experience the same calm, and be content to go on with him step by step, satisfied if we could see what to do from one day to another, and able to leave the rest. He had clearly thought out and arranged the first measures which it seemed prudent to take in our new circumstances. We must give up our house in London, sell his beloved books, and as much of the furniture as it was not absolutely necessary to keep, and go to live in some inexpensive country place, where our stock of ready money would last till some new plan of life opened out for us.

What a long, anxious discussion George and Nesta and I had over that letter ! At first, the thought of breaking up the old home seemed dread-

ful to me. I tried all I could to convince myself that it was not necessary. Could not I do something to earn an income which would make it possible for us to go on living as we had hitherto done? I was forming a hundred plans, when I had to resign them all in favour of one suggested by Hilary, which was far too rational and pleasant to the other members of the family for me to think of objecting to it.

Hilary's plan was, that we should all go to live with him at Morfa Bach. The house was large enough to hold us, he said, and his income would suffice to keep us all in comfort; so our removal from London was decided upon in a very few days.

I never quite knew what my father's feelings were about going to live at Morfa. I should once have supposed that to live there would be the thing of all others most distasteful to him. If it did cause him any special grief, no word ever betrayed it to any one. He approved of Hilary's plan as the wisest we could follow, and was full of grateful affection to him for suggesting it.

The only evidence he gave of the pain it cost him to separate himself from his old friends, and his old way of life was, that he chose to stay at Deepdale till Hilary was ready to receive him at Morfa, and thus

escaped taking a formal leave of the home he had to give up.

To the great surprise of Nesta and myself, my mother would not leave my father and Charlie, though there was something said at one time about my going to Deepdale, and setting her free to return home and superintend the packing of such of our household goods as were to follow us to Morfa. That my mother should trust such a work to me, would at one time have seemed almost incredible. She did so, however, and I gathered from this fact, that the days of my father's dependence on me were entirely over. She had taken her right place as his chief watcher now, and I should no longer be wanted.

On the very last night in the old house, when George and I sat for the last time in the dismantled study, with the evidence of our day's packing heaped up round us, we had a conversation over this new state of things, which did me good. George showed me that I must be content now to fill a less important place to my father than I had hitherto done, and he warned me not to embitter the comfort that had come to him in his sorrow by any petty jealousy or exacting of gratitude. I must not make the others feel now, when they were all longing to

serve him, that my past care had given me a better right than they had to help him. In family life there was sometimes such a thing as a generous withdrawal from service, in order to give others, who were longing to serve, their place. I must learn to practise that duty now.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ Autumn hath violets as well as Spring,
And age its sweetness hath as well as youth.”

MARY MAYNARD.

AFTER leaving our house, Nesta and I spent a few weeks in visits to old friends, and were the last of the home-party to arrive at Morfa. My mother had had time to receive and unpack all the furniture we had despatched from London, and to give such a different aspect to the once comfortless rooms of the farm-house, that I scarcely recognised them. The dark, low-ceilinged “keeping-room,” which I had thought too ugly for anything but a rubbish-place, had changed, in my mother’s hands, into a pleasant parlour. Our ancient worked chairs and spindle-legged tables and couches, which had looked shabby and old-fashioned in our London drawing-room, fitted into its odd nooks and corners as if they had been

made for them ; while our mother's beloved old china jars and cups, which had always in London been doomed to the seclusion of a dark closet, found here safe standing-room on the curious shelves and recesses of the oak mantelpiece. My father decided on taking the octagon room for his study, because the space between two of the windows afforded him a walk of precisely the same length as that to which he had been accustomed in the old den. His meditations were, alas ! in no danger of being disturbed by the contrast between the view from these windows and his former out-look on the dingy stable-wall. Hilary nailed up one of the superfluous doors and filled the recess with bookshelves, where Charlie arranged a few favourite books which George and I had taken it upon ourselves to keep back from the sale. My father found amusement for many a rainy day in learning to know by touch the exact position of each dearly-prized volume, and in practising himself in opening them at the passages he best liked to have read aloud to him. Before we had been at Morfa a month, no one ever thought of asking for a missing book of any one but my father.

I believe I felt the change from the old house

more than any one else. My London letters, regularly as they came, did not make up for the daily intercourse which had become so precious to me, and I was sometimes tempted to think that the other members of the family betrayed strange coldness of heart in accommodating themselves so easily to the loss of old friends. My father would indeed say sometimes, on returning from a walk, that he wished George could have taken it with him; but the wish was not a very earnest one, for I could not help seeing that, as long as he could have my mother's arm to lean upon, he did not really want any one else. My mother was his usual companion in his rambles, and, as the summer advanced, these rambles were so prolonged, that they sometimes occupied the entire morning or the long afternoon. My mother abandoned household business to Nesta when she discovered that the only chance of keeping my father out long in the open air was that she should be with him. By her good management it came to be his chief pleasure to be out of doors. I don't think he had ever cared much for scenery in his youth, and certainly he had never loved Morfa mountains and valleys. It was curious to observe how, seeing everything now through my mother's eyes, a new appre-

ciation of natural beauty grew up in him. He used to come in of an evening, radiant with pleasure, to tell me how beautiful the sunset had been, how fresh the upland pastures looked after last night's rain, how the great purple beeches in the Morfa Mawr gardens were deepening in colour as the year grew older, how rich the gorse looked in the stony hollows of the hills; and he said all this without the least effort or exaggeration of his own enjoyment. He really did derive more pleasure from hearing these sights described by my mother than any vision of his own had ever given him. Perhaps he had never in his life known how to see till she taught him. She had never lost her early delight in nature. A vision of the changes which spring and summer and autumn were working in the Morfa woods and fields, lived with her through every year of her confinement to dusty London streets, and square gardens. He had never hitherto sympathized in her love for her native place; its intensity had been a barrier between them; he had wondered and grieved over a regret which he had always felt somehow or other to be a reproach to himself. Now at last the secret of her love grew clear to him. Her words called up images of beauty and peace which the scenes them-

selves had never given him. It was as if he had gained instead of lost a sense. It became a constant source of wonder and amusement to the few people who visited our house to hear the way in which our father spoke of the country operations that were going on round him. We used to be asked over and over again if it was really true that he was blind. Hilary himself would sometimes appeal to him for information as to what was doing in such a field, or whose flock was feeding on such a hill. How happy my mother used to look when my father answered rightly! Her old timidity and silence, when in my father's company, had vanished entirely now. We young ones, when we saw them coming back from a walk together still talking, used to wonder what they could have found so interesting to say to each other. They were both of them younger then than we their children were, for they were freer from anxious thoughts and worldly care; and the full understanding of each other, which untoward circumstances had hitherto hindered, had come at last.

We young ones should have been ungrateful indeed if seeing them so happy had not helped us to bear our own share of trouble. Our two invalids,

Nesta and Charlie, gained health and strength during the bright days of that tranquil summer. Charlie took to reading diligently as soon as his health permitted him to use any exertion—so diligently, indeed, that Nesta had to be always on the watch to prevent him from injuring himself by over work. He was very much changed. Every little fatigue now brought back a return of distress and pain in his head. He had nothing left of his old eagerness and pleasure in learning. The work which once might have been done so easily had now to be struggled through under a constant penalty of pain. But there were other better changes. Charlie might never again be as bright and clever as he used to be, but we all felt how much more humble and patient he had grown. We could all admire the courage with which he set himself to repair his past faults.

Nesta had ample occupation in looking after Charlie and managing the household. Mrs. Morgan took care that this last should not be an easy task. By what miracle Nesta reduced her to order remained unknown to us. Mrs. Morgan certainly did not resign her power without a struggle. She tried every phase of ill-temper to weary Miss Ernestine

into leaving her to her own devices. When, however, she found that nothing she could say or do ruffled Nesta's quiet dignity, she suddenly changed her tactics, and determined that, since she could not be mistress, she would at least be prime minister. She grew fond of talking of "me and Miss Ernestine," and of astonishing the thriftless farmers' wives of the neighbourhood with an account of their domestic achievements.

After conquering Mrs. Morgan, there seemed to be nothing that Ernestine could not do. Always gentle, always quietly busy, always ready to interest herself in the business of every one who needed help, her influence gradually widened its sphere, till there was hardly a poor cot or lonely farm-house in the neighbourhood where it was not felt.

The summer passed without our hearing any news of Rosamond Lester. She was still abroad with Lady Helen. Three or four times we were agitated with the news that the whole party—Lady Helen, Mr. Carr, and Rosamond—were expected at Morfa Mawr; but we were sure to hear the next week that a letter, indefinitely postponing their arrival, had been received. Hilary said at last that he would never again believe that they were

coming. On the whole, there was less communication between the farm and the Great House than formerly. Mr. Lester remained in the state of health into which he had fallen a year before—neither much better nor worse. On very good days he was brought down into his library, where he would sometimes see Hilary, and listen, with nearly his old eagerness, to details respecting the management of the estate. With great effort he could pronounce a few words, which were intelligible to those accustomed to hear him speak; but he was apt to become very irritable when he was not understood at once, and on that account his doctor and nurse forbade him to see strangers. My mother paid one visit to the sick room, but Mr. Lester showed such painful excitement while she was with him, and suffered so much for days after the interview, that it was not considered advisable to repeat it. My father, though equally unwelcome at first, thought it right to persevere. He went sometimes with Hilary and sometimes alone, and after a time he was able to hope that Mr. Lester derived some comfort from his visits.

If I had not known how useless it was to dissuade my father from doing anything that he considered a duty, I should have tried to keep him away from

Morfa Mawr ; for it was only after seeing Mr. Lester that he ever seemed unhappy. The Great House had still, I feared, the power of casting a shadow over us all. Hilary was always cross after being there, whatever might have been his errand. My mother was depressed by the contrast between present and past times, and Nesta always returned from an hour's conversation with Mrs. Western a little graver than usual. The good old lady's talk was not calculated to raise her spirits, for it usually turned on Rosamond Lester, and on the satisfaction we all ought to feel at her consenting to the marriage which her grandfather had planned so long ago. I tried to persuade Nesta to let me take her share of our periodical visits to the hall, but Mrs. Western, like every one else, was fond of Nesta, and Nesta was too kind to pain her by keeping away. "My turn only comes once a week," she used to say when I begged her to let me take her place. "It is a very small sacrifice to make. Besides, it ought not to be a sacrifice at all. It is best to get used to seeing the house and to hearing of *it* before it is all over and I have to see other faces there."

The first event that broke the monotony of our lives at Morfa Bach, was the arrival of a letter from

Richard Moorsom, announcing his intention of paying us a visit. The letter came at the beginning of harvest time, and Hilary was a little annoyed at having the interruption of a visitor just then. Nesta and Charlie joined him in his inhospitable grumbling, while my mother looked so guilty, that I suspected she had known of the visit before, perhaps planned it with Lady Moorsom while she was at Deepdale.

Indisposed as we had been to welcome him, Mr. Moorsom's coming brought more gaiety among us than we had known for many a day. Charlie and I were obliged to acknowledge that we had not known before what a pleasant companion he could be, and also, that in order thoroughly to enjoy a visitor, one must have been shut up for three months in a place as remote from the civilized world as Morfa Bach farm. Hilary and he took to each other at once, and would have talked of farming the entire day, if my father, Charlie, and I, had not secured a share of the conversation to ourselves, by making laws about the length of time during which it was allowable to discuss an agricultural topic, and the number of remarks relating to the farm which might fairly be insinuated during the evening. Hilary was always transgressing, and

Charlie was always making us laugh, by insisting on seeing covert allusions to the forbidden topics in every word he uttered.

My father did not get much reading from either Charlie or me on the evenings of the week Mr. Moorsom stayed, nor, indeed, during the last few mornings; for after spending two days in walking about the country with Hilary, Mr. Moorsom discovered that he had sprained his ankle, and must for the future confine himself to the nearer views. We did not like to throw the trouble of entertaining him entirely on my mother and Nesta, so we gave ourselves a holiday, and generally all went out together, and spent the bright August days in watching the harvest work, or following the gleaners about the fields.

My mother was the only person with whom Mr. Moorsom seemed to care to have private conferences, and when Nesta saw she was not troubled with more than her fair share of attention, the slight constraint that had at first marked her manner, wore off. I really believe that I suffered more embarrassment than she did, and certainly all the ungracious acts fell to my share. It was always I who had to give cautionary glances, when my father and Hilary were

disposed to press our guest to prolong his stay at Morfa, and I had to be constantly making myself disagreeable, by interrupting conversations between my mother and Mr. Moorsom, when I suspected that she was growing too confidential and encouraging.

During the week of Mr. Moorsom's visit, we all chanced to be too busy to pay our usual visits to the hall. On Saturday morning my mother bethought herself of the omission, and reproached us for our negligence.

"How unkind Mrs. Western must have thought us," she observed; "we ought to have remembered that she was as lonely as ever, while we were amusing ourselves more than usual."

Hilary was just leaving the room when my mother spoke; he stopped, and turned round, to mutter something not very intelligible, about my mother's compassion being quite thrown away. Mrs. Western had not wanted us as much as we imagined. It was his opinion that the less we all went up to the hall for the future, the better.

Hilary had been silent and glum all breakfast-time, but as he could every now and then make an ungracious speech, we none of us attached any

particular meaning to this one. We concluded that some Owen or Morgan about the farm had taken advantage of harvest-time to be more aggravating than usual, and that the master's temper suffered in consequence.

My mother sighed, and wished that poor Hilary had not to work so hard, but decided at once, that if he did not wish us to go to the Great House, we must not think of going. Charlie was glad to have my mother's conscience set at rest, for he and Mr. Moorsom had agreed on making an excursion that day, to see a waterfall some miles distant from Morfa Bach, and they wished us all to join in it. Hilary had been persuaded to lend a light cart and horse; Charlie was to drive us, and we were to spend the whole day out-of-doors.

It proved a perfect day—one of those bright, still September days, when one feels obliged to make the most of every open-air pleasure, because the very perfection of its beauty warns one that the fading-time is near. We all enjoyed the excursion, my father and mother most of all. Mr. Moorsom was particularly watchful over our father all day, and managed so cleverly that he was able to do everything that we did. He helped him to climb to the

top of the hill, and carefully explained each of the views to be seen thence, and afterwards led him safely so near the waterfall that he could feel the spray on his face, and catch, amid the roar of its waters, the crisp patter of the droppings from the over-hanging trees which caught some of the water in its first plunge, and let it fall back into the dark pool below in a soft rain. My father's look of delight when his ear caught this sound, was as good a sight to see as any we had that day. Nesta could not but observe Mr. Moorsom's kindness to our father, and like him the better for it. I don't think he misunderstood the gratitude she showed in her own sweet, grave way, but it drew them nearer together than they had been all the week, and removed a slight coldness in their manner to each other, which had sometimes seemed to divide our party. For that one day we were all as happy and unconcerned as if we had agreed to forget everything that had passed, or that was to come.

We did not leave the waterfall till late in the afternoon, and it was growing dusk when we reached the little wood at the top of Morfa Bach Hill. Here we had to alight, for Charlie had promised Hilary not to drive the cart along the wood path. There was

a good deal of talking and laughing as Mr. Moorsom helped my father and mother and Nesta to get down from our awkward conveyance. I remember how cheerfully our voices sounded in the still evening air. I walked on, to open the gate, while they stood together, still talking.

At first I thought it was Hilary whom I saw leaning against the closed gate, and looking fixedly at the party grouped on the top of the hill. I was going to make some playful exclamation of surprise at his spending even the dark hours of a September day so idly, but as I came near, I perceived that the figure was slighter than Hilary's, the attitude one into which he never by any chance fell. I thought I recognised both, but I kept silent till I was near enough to see the stranger's face. Suddenly, just as I came near, he started up, drew his cap down over his face, and pushing hastily past me, plunged into a by-path, which led to one of the entrances of the Morfa Mawr gardens. I had not succeeded in seeing his face, but I had no longer any doubt who it was. It was Shafto Carr.

That was the reason of Hilary's ill humour at breakfast, then! The party whose coming we had so long dreaded had actually arrived, and we must

make up our minds to the chance of seeing one or other of them whenever we left the house. My heart sank for Nesta. How little she or I thought, when we took leave of Mr. Carr in London, that the next time we met him he would brush past me without a word!

I felt convinced that he had recognised me, and seen the rest of the party. He was in the shade; their figures were relieved against the still light sky. What had his thoughts been as he stood to watch them? What had brought him to linger near our gate? On the whole I was not sorry that Rosamond Lester's betrothed should hear Nesta's voice sounding for once as gaily as it used to sound. My heart felt very bitter against him, and I wished him to believe that she had learned to value him as lightly as his conduct showed he had valued her. I knew there was no fear that Nesta would not guard her dignity, but I was glad she could now be warned, that she need not come upon him as suddenly as I had done.

All the evening I was planning in what words I could best convey to Nesta the discovery I had made, but before I had an opportunity of being alone with her, Hilary forestalled me.

"Mother," he began, standing upright against the table, and speaking in a dry, hard tone ; "you sometimes complain that I never bring you home any news ; I have some to-night. Lady Helen Carr and her son, and Miss Lester arrived at Morfa Mawr yesterday afternoon. They are to stay here all the autumn. You see you need not trouble yourself any longer about entertaining Mrs. Western."

This was a long speech for Hilary to make, but it fell flat. No one answered. I did not look at Nesta, and I hoped no one else would. I suppose she must have given a sudden start, for a reel on which she was winding a skein of silk fell from her hands, and rolled to the opposite end of the room. Richard Moorsom went on his knees to look for it, and was a long time hunting it out of the dark corner where it had hidden itself. His face wore a painfully embarrassed expression when he brought the reel back to Nesta ; I think he was afraid of seeming to look at her curiously. He need not have been ; there was nothing to see. By that time she had regained as much of her composure as she had ever lost ; her quiet "thank you" seemed to take a spell off us all. When I next ventured to look at her, she had finished winding her skein and was stand-

ing behind Hilary's chair,' talking to him, with her hand on his shoulder. She was not saying anything particular, only asking some question about a poor Irish boy who had been taken ill in the harvest-field; but Hilary's brow cleared as he turned round to answer her, and after a few minutes' talk, the hard set lines of his mouth softened into a smile almost as sweet and patient as that with which she was looking down at him. I had noticed once or twice before that Nesta had more power to help Hilary out of his moody fits than any one else had.

I went to bed, hoping that the next morning might prove rainy enough to prevent the visitors at Morfa Mawr from venturing to church. We had had more than our share of sunshine; for once I should have been glad to see the hills opposite my window wrapt in rain-clouds. I did not have my wish; the weather next morning was as perfect as it had been all the week, and Nesta looked so much as usual when she came down to breakfast, that I felt almost ashamed of advising her to stay at home on the plea that yesterday's fatigue had indisposed her for the walk to church.

"Thank you, Janet," she said, decidedly; "but



you need not be afraid ; I am quite equal to it, indeed I am. I have been thinking, and I am sure it is best for me to go to church to-day. It will be a good beginning of the week, and I shall be better and stronger for not missing it."

I had followed her to her room to make my request, and now I stooped to kiss her pale face. " Darling, you don't know how sorry I am for you. I cannot bear to think of your having to see them. I think he might have kept away from here."

" It is their home—hers, and soon to be his. Let us try to welcome them to it ; I shall do it best in church to-day."

" I cannot forgive him," I said, bitterly. " He has chosen the Great House and the Morfa estate instead of you."

" Nay, let us hope it is not quite that," said Nesta. " I can bear it best when I think of all the excuses there are for him. I was not equal to him, and I never could forget that his mother thought I was spoiling his life. Perhaps I ought to have believed that my love was worth more than Rosamond Lester's riches. But I could not be sure of that when I had been hearing his mother talk ; so I grew depressed and doubtful, and he misunderstood me and was dis-

appointed in me. It is a great rest to feel that I need not blame him very much."

" Well, we had best not talk about it," I said. " If I am to feel charitably towards him at church to-day, I must not hear you excuse him."

We had a long hot walk. When we reached the church the service was just beginning, and most of the congregation assembled in their pews. The great square pew in the chancel, appropriated to the Morfa Mawr family, was in full view of ours. The first glance showed me that it was occupied. I tried not to see the faces in it, but even with my eyes on my prayer-book, I could not prevent the well-known forms and attitudes from haunting me. There were Lady Helen's stooping shoulders, more drawn together than ever, and there were her keen grey eyes bent upon us. She looked more than a year older than when I had last seen her; even success could not brighten her face. Rosamond Lester stood by Mrs. Western. Her back was turned to our pew, designedly, I thought, for when the sermon began and she ought to have faced the pulpit as Mrs. Western did, she kept her place. I only knew her by her figure, so much taller than any other, and by the stately carriage of her head. In the corner of the pew which best

commanded ours, sat Mr. Carr. I hoped Nesta had not so good a view of his face as I had, for it wore an expression of such thorough dissatisfaction and melancholy, that even my anger against him was softened a little. Glancing from his half-scornful, half-dejected face to Nesta's, I could not help moralizing on the greater pain and injury which comes to a person from wrong-doing, than from suffering wrong.

I hope other people listened more attentively to the sermon than I did. At length it was over and the congregation began to leave the church. The occupants of the great pew moved first. My father generally liked to linger to the last, and then walk slowly down the church-yard, leaning on Hilary's arm. I hoped we might thus escape meeting the Morfa Mawr party. Some of them must have lingered purposely, for though my father walked more leisurely even than usual, they were still standing near the gate when he emerged from the porch.

There was nothing for it but to walk on and speak to them. Hilary and my father and mother went first. Nesta was detained by a poor woman, who wished to speak to her, and seeing that Mr. Moorsom was determined to wait for her, I stayed too, and so

did not witness the first greetings. When we left the church Lady Helen was already in eager talk with my father and mother, and Mrs. Western, holding both Hilary's hands, was claiming his sympathy in her joy at having her dear child with her again. Shafto and Rosamond were standing together, but neither looking nor speaking to each other. I think Rosamond's eyes were turned pityingly on my father's face. No one could now see him without noticing that he was blind. Lady Helen must have been a little startled, perhaps shocked, by the discovery. I thought so, at least, from the flush on her cheek, and the quick eager way in which she was speaking on indifferent subjects to my mother.

Mr. Carr's eyes were fixed on the ground when we came up, but I felt that he had been watching us three as we stood under the porch, and as we walked down the path between the graves. A moment of embarrassed silence followed; we stood still, none of us daring to look up, or speak a word of greeting. At last Nesta came forward and held out her hand, first to Rosamond, and then to Shafto Carr. She looked full in his face as she turned to him, holding out her hand. Did he read all there was in her look as clearly as I did? The forgiveness, the renun-

ciation, the dignified acceptance of a new position towards him—the sorrow, the hope for him, that gave the upward glance of her gentle eyes such pathetic meaning to me. Whatever he saw in her face, he was clearly unprepared for such a greeting from her. He half-uttered an exclamation, checked himself, and then put out a trembling uncertain hand and clasped hers. I could not interpret his manner as I interpreted Nesta's. Was it anger, or bitter grief, or shame that so darkened and changed his face? He stood for an instant holding Nesta's hand, looking at her with angry, inquiring eyes; and then, seeing Mr. Moorsom approaching to speak to her, he suddenly turned his back upon us, and walked through the gate of the church-yard out into the road.

“Ah, Shafto is growing impatient,” I heard Lady Helen's sharp voice exclaim. “He thinks the church-yard not the fittest place for greetings. Let us move on.”

We followed her towards the carriage which was waiting outside, but there was another little pause before they got in. Rosamond would turn to speak to me, and Mrs. Western would reiterate her entreaties that we would all come soon and often to the Great House, not perceiving that no one was in a mood to

listen to them. At last, Lady Helen, losing all patience, called her son to hand Rosamond into the carriage. She had to speak twice before he heeded her; meanwhile, Rosamond sprang in and seated herself. I did not envy Lady Helen, the look she got from under her son's black brows as he came near to offer her his arm. If the success of her anxious scheming for him had brought such bitter feelings between them as that look betrayed, I fancied even she must begin to think she had paid dearly for it.

I saw Mr. Carr turn one more look on Nesta before the carriage drove away; it was just as he seated himself by Rosamond's side. She had addressed some remark to him, and her beautiful proud face had been turned to him for a moment. After answering her in a single word, he glanced aside at Ernestine, who was still standing where we left her in the church-yard, her eyes fixed on the ground, her head bent, her hands clasped before her, as still as if a spell had fallen over her and she had no power to move or look up. Lady Helen, following the direction of her son's eye, glanced too from Rosamond to Nesta, and then a triumphant proud smile brightened her face. I hardly wondered at it as I contrasted the two, our pale, grave Ernestine,

who looked more than usually insignificant and faded that day, and Rosamond, whose proud beauty fixed the wondering eyes of the villagers on her with a sort of reverent awe. No doubt about which it would gratify Lady Helen's pride most to call her daughter. Her pride—but only her pride. The triumph of Lady Helen's look was not softened by any touch of love towards the daughter she had chosen. In the bottom of my heart I pitied Rosamond more than Nesta. How cold, how hard the glitter of prosperity that surrounded her looked to me who knew what there was beneath it!

I thought I should have had an opportunity of disburdening my mind of some of my concern for Rosamond, for Hilary invited me to walk home with him by the shore; but when we were alone I had not courage to talk to him, he looked so thoroughly disturbed and unhappy.

We were within sight of the house before he spoke. "Well," he said at last, with a deep sigh, "there's one comfort in it. One good comes to me from her marrying that fellow; I shall get away from here after poor Mr. Lester is gone. If she had married any one else I might have felt it a duty to stay on for my mother's sake; but nothing, nothing

on earth, shall induce me to serve him. After his conduct to Nesta there never *need* be anything but enmity between us."

"Oh, Hilary, I am afraid you are glad to have such a reason for hating him. However, I agree that you cannot possibly stay when he is master. Yet I shall be sorry to go. Our father and mother are so happy here; it will seem cruel to disturb them."

"Many things in this world seem cruel, but one has to do them and bear them."

I looked up into Hilary's face. His lips were white and pressed close together; his brow knit into its darkest frown.

"Yes, but may not part of the hardness come from our not understanding the beginning, nor seeing the end, of what is happening to us?" I ventured to suggest.

"I don't know. We *must* hope so, or there would be no getting on at all. As one grows older one learns that there is no use 'kicking against the pricks.' One must take what comes, and crush out the thought that the very opposite would have been better."

"How wonderfully in our father's case resignation has taken all the sting out of his trial!"

“Yes, but I’m not like him.”

“He says he was once very like you.”

“Well, here we are at home. Don’t say anything to the others about the prospect of having to leave here. We’ll keep all the trouble we can to ourselves.”

In the evening, after tea, Nesta and Mr. Moorsom had a long walk up and down the garden in the twilight. I wondered at their staying out so late, and was a little curious, I confess, to know what they had been saying to each other. There was neither excitement nor gloom on either face when they came in, only I thought they were a little more intimate and friendly than before. It was Mr. Moorsom’s last evening, and he had some conversation with my mother after he came in from the garden. He seemed to be taking a long leave of her, for I could not hear anything said about future meetings. During supper he spoke as if he were likely to be absent from England for some time. He had a mind to travel for a year or two; perhaps he should go to Jamaica, where his mother had some property. At Deepdale, he said, everything was in such order that he could not find enough to occupy him; perhaps out there, he might find real

hard work, and people who wanted some one to look after them. Ernestine applauded the project, and drew him on to talk of schemes for converting idle negroes into industrious, orderly farm labourers; and Hilary struck in with suggestions and questions about the nature and capabilities of West Indian soil, which gave the conversation a decidedly practical and unsentimental tone.

My mother, meanwhile, sighed, and confessed that she did not like to hear of people going so far away. There must, she supposed, be clergymen or missionaries, or some one to look after those idle negroes, who, after all, were quite content, and would not thank Mr. Moorsom for coming out to make them work, whereas his mother and all his friends in England would miss him sadly.

Mr. Moorsom managed to interrupt a question of Hilary's to remark, in rather a shaky voice, that the hope of being sometimes spoken of and recollected here, where he had passed the most precious week of his life, would be the best he should take away with him. My mother hesitated for a suitable reply, and Nesta took advantage of the pause to observe, that it was late, and that since Mr. Moorsom and Hilary were to start early next morning, we ought

not to keep them up longer. So our last good-byes were rather hastily spoken.

I followed Nesta to her room, half hoping to hear some word of regret for our friend's departure. I had learned to like him so much, that I was almost provoked at her complete indifference.

"Poor fellow! how sorry he is to leave us," I said.

"Yes, he and Hilary are cut out for friends."

"You and he had a long talk in the garden," I said.

Nesta could not help smiling. "Oh, Janet, I did not know you were so inquisitive." Then, growing grave, she added, "Dearest, I have not disappointed you, have I? You did not think that anything he could say would change me?"

"Hardly; and yet it was unlike you to let him talk so long, if you were quite resolved."

"He asked me to listen, and I am glad I did, for I have made him understand me better than he did before, and, I hope, removed some painful thoughts. He knows now that it is just because I am so grateful, and esteem him so highly, that I cannot do what he asks. He wished to speak to me this evening, because he thought I must be so mortified by what passed to-day, that it would do me

good to hear of his constant love and homage. I acknowledge how nobly kind the thought was, and I hope I have made him see that I could not be so selfish as to take all his love merely to make it serve as a shield for my own vanity."

"But you might have learned to love him for himself. You acknowledge how good he is."

"Too good not to deserve a more entire love than I can ever give him. Don't look pained, dear Janet; I am not speaking as if my life were spoiled, or I were always to be unhappy. I don't mean to be, you shall see, if you will let me take my own way. I have a feeling that I cannot go back in my life. It seems like going back to let a fresh earthly love fill exactly the place of one that has been taken away. If the vacant place is ever to be rightly filled, and the heart and life made free and perfect again, it ought to be by the coming in of a higher and more beautiful love than the old, or all the pain and agony would have been in vain. I can understand that sometimes when a person has only loved a little, or made a mistake, the second love may be truer and more beautiful than the first; but I gave my heart away so entirely, and have taken it back with so much pain, that it seems im-

possible for me ever to give it again. Yet I hope I shall not grow cold-hearted. I think not. I think I love every one better for what I have suffered; but I want to love God best of all. Once I felt as if I had no room for Him in my heart; every corner of it was filled with the idol I had set up for myself. Now I have learned the truth of what Thomas à Kempis tells us, that "He is the true peace of the heart, and that all things out of Him are hard and restless."

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Take her for your wife,
For I have wished this marriage night and day
For many years.”

TENNYSON.

WE were very quiet for some days after Richard Moorsom left us. Hilary found work for himself on a distant part of the estate, and was absent all day; and Nesta avoided the chance of encountering visitors by being constantly busy in her own part of the house. On Wednesday Lady Helen and Rosamond called, but I was out, so they only saw my father and mother. The visit lasted half-an-hour. Lady Helen talked to my father, and Rosamond to my mother; but, though my curiosity led me to cross-question both very particularly, I could not gather a satisfactory account of the interview. My mother confessed that she could not bring herself to meet Rosamond Lester as cordially

as she would have done a year ago. She had not been rude, she assured me, but she could not seem pleased to see Rosamond, or encourage her to speak about her prospects. They had just said a little about the beautiful harvest weather, that was all. My father, on the contrary, had fairly out-talked Lady Helen. She was disposed to be communicative, and had not only mentioned her son's approaching marriage with Rosamond, but had presumed to compliment my father on the good judgment he had shown in putting an end to Nesta's and Shafto's engagement. I could not make my father repeat his answer, but I gathered that he had spoken his mind very plainly respecting Mr. Carr's conduct, and that Lady Helen had taken leave, in a less triumphant and self-congratulatory state of mind, than she was in when she came. As she wished my mother good-bye, she informed her that Mr. Carr had left Morfa that morning, and was not expected to return for some weeks.

After hearing this account of the morning's visit, I was surprised to receive in the evening a little note from Rosamond, begging me earnestly to spend the next morning at Morfa Mawr. I had rather not have gone; I felt we could never again

have any comfortable intercourse with Rosamond Lester, and that it would be better to drop at once all semblance of cousinly intimacy ; but I saw that Nesta and Hilary would be disappointed if I refused, so I let myself be over-persuaded. On Thursday my father and I walked up early to the Great House together. When we arrived there, Mrs. Western took my father up to Mr. Lester's room, and directed me to seek Rosamond in the library. Morfa Mawr was no longer so formidable a place as it had been in the days of Mr. Lester's vigilance. I was struck with the more home-like aspect of the house when I entered the library, and saw Rosamond sitting writing at a table, with her favourite Newfoundland dog reposing at her feet. There was a look of greater gentleness on her face than I had ever seen there before. Yet she did not seem happy. To my surprise, her large eyes filled with tears as I took her hand. She turned from me immediately, and did not speak till she had perfect command of voice ; but I could not after that keep up the cold, formal manner I had prescribed for myself. We talked first of my father, and I was drawn on by her questions to relate much of our family history since I had last seen her. She listened intently till I began to enlarge

on the generous manner in which Hilary had behaved since my father's misfortune had made us all dependent on him ; then she interrupted me.

"It is right you should be grateful," she said, "but I do not see how my cousin Hilary *could* have acted otherwise. Would not every son have done the same ?"

"No doubt there are many sons who would have shared their home with a father and mother situated as Hilary's are," I answered ; "but there is not one in a hundred who would have made them feel, as he does, that the home is theirs, not his ; that he is the least important child of the house, instead of the master. It is not the thing done, it is his way of doing it that is so noble."

I saw for an instant a bright light of enthusiasm shine from Miss Lester's eyes ; then some gloomy thought seemed to rise up in her mind and quench it.

"You must forgive me," she said, "if I cannot see any *great* proof of nobleness in sacrifices made for those one loves. I am not depreciating your brother's conduct or yours : I am only envying you. It is your just reward for having always obeyed and loved, that your duty is plain and your sacrifices free-will offerings. It is my punishment for my past

rebellion, that now, when I want to obey, there is no sweetness in my surrendering of myself, though I have tried to make it complete. It has to be done doubtfully, with a troubled conscience, as a proof of repentance rather than of love."

I was puzzled how to answer. While I hesitated, Rosamond spoke again, altering her tone as if she were beginning upon a fresh subject.

"I have asked you so many questions, that now I ought to tell you something about myself. It is something that will surprise you—but such announcements always do surprise. I am engaged to Mr. Carr. You know him a little, I think. Were you not once staying at Broadlands when he was there?"

Her countenance did not change as she spoke. No colour flew to her face, no light came into her eye. There was a quiet mournfulness in her voice and manner that sat very strangely on her.

"I should have been surprised," I answered, "if I had not heard it before. Lady Helen Carr told my father. But even then it was old news; we had heard it months before."

"Indeed! My engagement only dates from last Sunday afternoon."

"From last Sunday afternoon!" I could not help repeating her words with an accent of astonishment — almost of dismay, that naturally awoke her wonder.

"Why does it surprise you so much that it should have been last Sunday? Why more than if it had been months ago?"

"Only," I stammered—"only I should be sorry to think you had engaged yourself hastily on any sudden impulse."

"Why, if it was a right impulse?"

"It is such a very serious thing to do. But I beg your pardon. I have no right to speak in this way."

"Yes, you have. I wish to explain to you how my engagement came about, to show you that I am not acting from caprice, or quite without consideration. I have considered, indeed I have, for months. I could not help it that the moment when I had to decide came upon me suddenly."

"I hope you don't think I take [upon myself to judge you."

"Oh, Janet, if you could be more friendly to me! I have so few friends."

Once more Rosamond's beautiful eyes filled with

tears, and I was moved to say some affectionate words, which seemed to comfort her.

“I have had few real friends,” she went on, “but I have always found one in Mr. Carr. When he first paid us a visit here, he and I became friends at once, just because we came to a mutual understanding that we were never to be anything more. We both knew my grandfather’s plan for us, and I felt grateful to him for understanding at once how distasteful it was to me; how it humbled me to know that my grandfather had promised to give me away as part of the estate, to make up to Lady Helen for her old disappointment. Mr. Carr used to laugh with me over my indignation on this subject, and during the summer of his first visit, he saved me from many a quarrel with my grandfather, by hiding my ill-humour, and keeping up a sort of mock courtship when either Lady Helen or Mr. Lester was present. At last something made me see that we had carried our mystification too far, and deceived others as well as those we meant to deceive. Then came my long illness; our intercourse was interrupted, and when we met again a year and a half after, we did not fall into the old pleasant intimacy. We were both very much changed. He had grown older and graver,

and my mind was weighed down by remorse for my conduct to my grandfather. In my sorrow I found him a kind, considerate friend. When I saw that his kindness never varied, I began to value it—I have had so little steady, uniform kindness shown me in my life. The very best people have been changeable and capricious to me. But I don't know why I say all this to you; it sounds as if I were excusing myself for having accepted Mr. Carr. I know it needs no excuse. I only wish to show you, that the step I took last Sunday was not really hasty and unpremeditated. I might not have taken it so soon if we had not returned to Morfa just now. I came because Mrs. Western encouraged me to hope that my grandfather would be glad to see me, and that my coming would do him good. It disappointed me greatly to find, when I arrived, that he shrank from seeing me, and was disposed to put off our meeting from day to day. Lady Helen was admitted into his room at once, and he showed plainly that he liked to have her near him, but he never asked for me. On Sunday I was told that I might sit with him for a few minnites during the afternoon. Lady Helen and Mr. Carr went to his room first. I was to follow. Lady Helen thought my grand-

father would be less agitated by seeing me if they were already with him. Ever since my grandfather's seizure I have always, I confess, shrunk from going into his room. It is terrible to see him whom I have feared and almost hated, lying there such a pitiable object; so helpless and stricken, only able to greet me with a slow, painful movement of his eyes. I felt this pain more vividly than ever last Sunday afternoon; when I met his look of dumb, helpless suffering, I hardly knew how to bear it. I wished to throw myself on my knees before him, and confess my remorse for having thwarted him during the years when I might have made him happy. Of course I dared not do this. Lady Helen had warned me not to show the least emotion. I could only walk up to his sofa, and stand looking at him. I have never kissed him since I was a child. His eyes were fixed on me, and there was no anger in them; that was the most I could hope for. At last, seeing that I could scarcely stand, Mr. Carr drew a chair near the sofa, placed me in it, and stood for an instant by my side. Then my grandfather's face changed; his eyes brightened, and his poor distorted lips parted into a smile—the only smile, I think, that in all his life was ever called up by me. Mr. Carr

was turning to move away, but I, not thinking much of what I was doing, but only anxious to please my grandfather, put my hand on his arm to keep him near me. He knelt down by my side, and took my hand in his ; then my grandfather's face brightened still more ; and during all the time we stayed, he lay back on his sofa quiet and smiling, looking at us both. Once he turned his head round to Lady Helen, and said something. I could not understand the strange, half-spoken words, but Lady Helen told us they meant, that he was glad to see Shafto and me together, and that he hoped we would often come. I was happy while I was in my grandfather's room. As soon as I had left it, a terrible feeling of dismay at what I had done came over me. I could hardly bring myself to come down stairs when the dinner-bell rang ; but I felt that I must make the effort. I suppose Mr. Carr saw how constrained and frightened I was, for in the evening he spoke to me. I need not tell you what he said. I don't suppose it was such an offer as most girls would have listened to, but it pleased me. There were few professions of love, only promises of faithful friendship and kindness. He did not profess to be indifferent to my fortune, as every one else who has ever spoken to

me has done (how untruly, I know!). He told me that he was ambitious, but he said that his ambition was of a kind that I should not be ashamed to share. I believe him. I shall take an interest in his career; and if even we are not very happy (I don't expect ever to be very happy), we may do a great deal of good. Don't you think so? Now I have told you all, cannot you say a word of approval or congratulation? Indeed I want some encouraging words!"

She had set me a hard task, and I did not perform it well. To my great relief, my stammering, vaguely-expressed hopes for her happiness were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Western, with a message from my father that he was waiting for me.

When I rose to go, leaving my sentence unfinished, I saw by the expression of Rosamond's face that the way in which I had received her confidence had pained and disappointed her. She made no remonstrance, but her manner to me changed. After that day we met often, and were very good friends when we met, but she never again attempted to open her heart to me. I was sorry to lose her friendship, sorry to seem cold and capricious to her, but I could

not help it. For Hilary's and Nesta's sake, it was important that we should have little intercourse with Morfa Mawr, and avoid hearing and seeing the talk and preparations that were likely to go on during the coming months. If I had not been convinced of this necessity from the first, I should have felt it when I saw how very much disturbed both Hilary and Nesta were, by the history of my interview with Rosamond. I would gladly have concealed part of what I had heard, but they both showed the same perverse determination to know every word, while almost every word gave them fresh pain. Nesta was always sweet and cordial in her manner to Rosamond when they met, yet our visits to the Great House grew daily more unsatisfactory and painful to us all, and I was glad when the shortening October days gave me an excuse for restricting our walks within a shorter distance than Morfa Mawr.

In October George Armstrong came to spend some weeks of his autumn vacation with us. I suppose that I profited most by this visit, for I remember that I then first discovered that the Morfa Bach farm-house *could* look as home-like as the old London home; but I think the others had a large

share of advantage too. George could not come anywhere without bringing sunshine with him. My father and Hilary claimed the help of his clear judgment to decide some questions of family economy that were perplexing them just then.

Charlie was now quite well enough to return to college, and sufficiently prepared, my father thought, to try again for a degree, or even for honours; but unhappily there were large bills still owing to tradesmen in Cambridge, and my father did not like him to return there till he was able to pay them. Poor Charlie! how sorrowful he used to look when the question of how this difficulty could be met, was brought up again and again in our evening consultations. The money he owed amounted to a far larger sum than we could hope to economize in a reasonable time, but it had occurred to Hilary that we might raise it by selling the Tan-y-Coed farm,—he, for his part, being ready to relinquish the future possession of his estate (as we had always called it) for the sake of furthering Charlie's return to college, and relieving my father's mind from anxiety on his account. The other members of the family demurred at so extreme a measure. Our very existence as a family, in my mother's eyes, was bound up in our

retaining possession of that dearly-prized corner of mountain land.

George had a patient ear for everything that was said on both sides of the question. It was like him, to be ready to hear all we wished to say, but I thought now and then that he was more than necessarily forward in bringing up the discussion, and I wondered why he would persist in asking my mother questions about her father and uncle, which were certain to tempt her to descant lengthily on the altered circumstances of the Wynne family, and to lament over the failure of her father's often-made assertion, that as long as there were Wynnes in the world, the Tan-y-Coed and Morfa lands must of necessity belong to them. My mother thought it almost irreverent to take the last step, which proved her father's words untrue.

My surprise at George's curiosity lessened when I learnt that he had spent two mornings at Tan-y-Bryn, in Mr. Morgan's office—engaged in hunting out papers and deeds referring to the Tan-y-Coed property, which in old times had been intrusted to Mr. Morgan's father, and which no one had since thought of taking out of the son's hands.

Hilary was annoyed with George for having any

communication with Mr. Morgan, and would not forgive him for calling at his office, though George reminded him that it was impossible to sell the Tan-y-Coed farm till we had all the necessary papers in our possession.

The last trace of pleasant weather seemed to go with George Armstrong. I discovered, the morning he left us, that winter had really set in, with murky skies and clinging mist, and weary down-pouring of rain, that washed the last yellow leaves from the trees, and made the lanes impassable to all but very determined feet. Even wood fires could hardly lighten up the dark sitting-room, or keep the mist out of the octagon parlour. It certainly was a dreary November. We only saw Miss Lester twice during the month. Mr. Carr spent a fortnight at Morfa Mawr, but it rained incessantly while he stayed, and Nesta and I were glad of an excuse to keep close to the house and avoid all danger of meeting him. When he left, we learned from Mrs. Western that a late day in December had been fixed for the wedding.

CHAPTER XIX.

“ New Year coming on apace,
What have you to give us ?
Bring you scathe, or bring you grace ? ”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IT wanted two days to Christmas. My mother, Mrs. Morgan, and Nesta were busy in the kitchen-regions with preparations for coming festivities, in which I was not considered competent to take part. My father and Charlie, disgusted with the unusual bustle that pervaded the house, set out for a long walk; and I, feeling indisposed to settle to my usual employments, was driven to occupy myself in tidying the book-shelves and putting my writing-desk in order. It was just the sort of work to suit an idle person on a busy morning. I soon succeeded in making the study look as unlike itself as the rest of the house; but, having accomplished this, I did

not make much further progress in the task I had set myself. Looking over old letters is a very proper occupation for the end of the year; but it is apt to be a thoughtful one. I fell into musing fits, during which my tidying stood still. What a long year it had been! How terrible some of its events would have seemed, how impossible others, if they had been predicted to me on its first day! and yet they had come, and we had lived through them, overwhelmed neither by the joy nor the sorrow.

From the past my thoughts flew on to the future, and, in spite of the experience on which I had been musing, I fell into my old habit of picturing it to myself. I seemed to see a monotonous, somewhat shaded road stretching on before us. One tranquil year would, I thought, follow another, while my father and mother would pass gently towards old age, and Hilary would grow more and more engrossed in his work, and Nesta follow her chosen career of quiet usefulness, and George and I look forward patiently—perhaps with a little heart-sickness—to the happiness which we believed could only be reached through long years of waiting.

I was roused at last from my reverie by hearing footsteps in the hall. I concluded that my father

and Charlie had returned from their walk. I must not let them find the study more untidy than they had left it. I stooped down and began to collect the scattered books and papers, intending to thrust them into my desk and leave their arrangement till I was next in the mood for such work. I had my back to the door, and did not turn round when it opened ; but the sound of the first footfall I heard made me throw down my bundle of papers and spring up. My ear had not deceived me : it was George Armstrong who had entered the room. After the first joyful exclamation, I was not surprised at his appearance. I had been planning all the morning how pleasant it would be if he were to bethink himself of coming down to spend his Christmas holiday with us.

It was not till our first greetings had been spoken that I observed something unusual in George's face and manner. I could not exactly say what it was, he did not look at all like a bearer of bad news ; yet he certainly did not talk or listen like a person at ease. He was restless and preoccupied. I scolded him at last for giving a random answer to some question I had asked. "What could he be thinking of?" His eyes grew eager and yet grave as he turned them suddenly on me.

“Shall I tell you? Janet, are you prepared to hear strange and startling news, which I have come on purpose to bring?”

Studying his face, and seeing nothing alarming there, I playfully defied him to tell me news that I should consider strange. I was in a mood to take wonders calmly, and he would find I had anticipated whatever he had to tell. Had he been made a judge, or my father a bishop?

“Janet, the news I have to tell has often been in your mind—I believe it is there now. Say it out boldly at once, and save me the trouble of telling you.”

He was mistaken. Nothing had been further from my thoughts till that moment. Then all at once I knew; and just because I had so often fancied receiving such news, did the reality startle and almost shock me. I think nothing frightens one so much as finding a dream come true.

“You have found out something about the Morfa estate,” I said—“the something that Mr. Morgan has always known. Oh, George! tell me—be quick.”

He laughed at me for looking so frightened, and the laugh did me good. When the colour had returned to my cheeks, and I looked like myself again, he answered my question.

"I have found out far more than ever Morgan knew. Janet, I have found proof—certain proof—that the Morfa estate has never belonged legally to Mr. Lester, and that your mother is now its rightful owner."

"But Hilary said that was impossible."

"So I should have said three days ago, and yet it is true."

"The Morfa estate—Morfa Mawr, and the mines, and everything—to mamma, do you say? I cannot take it in. What will become of Mr. Lester and Rosamond? Oh, George! after all Lady Helen's scheming! What will Lady Helen say?"

Such a tumult of thoughts rushed upon me—joyful, perplexed, incredulous—that for some time I could neither ask coherent questions nor understand the information which George was eager to give. It was not that day, or for many days, that I fully understood the importance of his discovery. The first thing that grew clear to me was, that I had been right in my surmise respecting Mr. Morgan's curiosity and interest in Llewellyn Wynne. Llewellyn had not died at the time when the report of his death had been believed at Morfa, and the circumstance of his having survived his brother for

some ten or fifteen years was one of momentous importance to Mr. Lester. This fact had been proved to him first by Morgan on the day of their last interview, and no doubt it was the shock of receiving such information suddenly which had brought on his illness. Morgan had long had a vague idea that Mr. Lester was anxious to believe that Llewellyn Wynne died when quite a young man; but he had never been able to discover any reason for such anxiety, and he was quite unprepared for the effect his news had upon Mr. Lester. What he witnessed on that day fixed in his mind a suspicion that had long been brooding there; and when he and George had conferred together in the autumn, being himself in despair of ever gaining any light on the mystery, he had imparted to George all the circumstances of his acquaintance with Llewellyn Wynne, and laid before him the proofs he possessed that his death had occurred in America within the last ten years.

It seemed that Morgan had been able to render some services to Llewellyn Wynne, whom he accidentally came across in some backwood settlement, where he was living in great poverty. A feeling of respect for a family with which his father and

grandfather had been connected for many years, had induced Morgan to befriend the unhappy man, and to keep up a certain degree of intercourse with him till the time of his death. Encouraged by his kindness, Llewellyn had frequently dwelt on the subject of his misfortunes, and the injustice inflicted on him by Mr. Lester. He had spoken in a somewhat vague way (much as my mother used to speak to us), about his brother's often-repeated assurance, that he had provided against the possibility of the Morfa estate leaving the Wynne family, and made it certain that, as long as there were people bearing the name of Wynne in existence, the lands, which their ancestors had owned for so many centuries, must remain in their possession. Morgan had paid very little attention to these assurances, which seemed to him entirely unfounded, till his return to England and entrance into his father's business, brought him into constant communication with Mr. Lester. Then various circumstances brought back Llewellyn's words to his mind. A conviction grew upon him that Mr. Lester had never felt secure in the possession of the Morfa estate, till the lapse of twenty years had given him a new title; and it occurred to him that the proofs

he held of Llewellyn Wynne's existence within the twenty years, might possibly prove of the greatest importance to the surviving members of Hilary Wynne's family. After his quarrel with Mr. Lester he searched diligently among his father's papers, in the hope of discovering some ground on which Mr. Lester's title might be questioned. Up to the time of George's interview with him he had found no clue to such a discovery.

It was reserved for George to find this clue. He came upon it accidentally while he was making inquiries which had been rendered necessary by the sale of the Tan-y-Coed farm. Tan-y-Coed had belonged to my mother's maternal grandfather, Mr. Price, of Tan-y-Coed. George had had occasion to refer to Mr. Price's will, and there he read a sentence which referred to some marriage-settlement respecting the Morfa estate. He did not understand the words of the sentence, but they awakened his curiosity and his keen discernment. The name of one of the witnesses to the will was known to George. It was that of a London solicitor, whose grandson was still living in London. To his office George went, with some hope of finding the deed of which Mr. Morgan had certainly never heard. After a long search a dupli-

cate copy had been found, and it was this discovery which George considered so important. It proved to be a settlement of the estate, made by Hilary Wynne at the time of his marriage. Influenced by his great anxiety that Morfa should never be alienated from the family, he provided that, if he died without having a son, his brother Llewellyn should inherit the estate; that it should pass to his son if he had one; but that if he also died without male descendants, and Hilary Wynne had a daughter,—it should revert to her. The original of this deed Mr. Wynne had apparently destroyed, most likely, George thought, at Mr. Lester's instigation. It had been Mr. Lester's aim to induce Mr. Wynne to mortgage his estate. This deed had stood in the way, and Mr. Wynne had probably less scruple in destroying it, because he believed that his brother had died childless, and because he hoped to pay off his mortgages to Mr. Lester and secure the inheritance to his only child, when the mines on his estate began to yield the wealth he expected from them. The existence of the duplicate copy of the deed, intrusted by Mr. Price to his solicitor, had probably been forgotten by both Mr. Wynne and Mr. Lester, and it would never have been disinterred from the heap of

papers among which it lay concealed, but for George's vigilance.

I think the fact that George was the discoverer gave me more pleasure than the discovery itself. When I grew calm enough to think about it, I was not at all sure that we should be any happier for possessing Morfa, now that Rosamond's approaching marriage with Mr. Carr put out of Hilary's reach the object which he had once thought to gain by such a change of circumstances. Wealth would not restore my father's eyesight, or give my mother the youth and health which would prevent her finding its responsibility a burden. Neither could it heal the disappointment which had darkened Hilary's and Nesta's lives.

I could only comfort myself by moralizing on the bitter lesson which these events would give to Lady Helen. A sort of pity, even for her, came into my mind as I thought how cruel a mockery of all her scheming, her son's marriage with Rosamond would now be. She had struggled so hard for it—done so much wrong to secure it—and when it was accomplished it would be the thing of all others she would least desire. Rosamond poor—Rosamond without Morfa, would indeed be an unwelcome

daughter. I could not help pitying them all. These sobering considerations made me look sufficiently composed when it became necessary to inform the rest of the family of George's arrival. I persuaded him not to tell his news until the evening, and then I was able to enjoy seeing my father's countenance brighten at the sound of George's voice, and hearing the joyful welcomes of my mother and Nesta. I fancied that Hilary showed some surprise and curiosity at George's appearance, the others took his coming as a matter of course. My father, George, and Charlie had the conversation to themselves during dinner; I was too much excited to talk on indifferent subjects, and Nesta was more silent than usual. I learned the cause of her gravity during the evening, when my mother observed casually that Mrs. Morgan had been telling them Mr. Carr was expected to arrive that night at Morfa Mawr. The carriage had passed our house on its way to the station to meet him.

At last dinner was over. Hilary wheeled my father's chair into its winter-corner by the fire, Charlie took down the book which he was in the course of reading aloud to my father in the evening. My mother asked Nesta to bring her knitting, the preliminary to her settling herself for her evening nap.



Then I looked at George, and he began. I hardly know how the news was told. He tried to prepare them for it gradually, but they were all very slow in comprehending his intention. My mother went on fidgetting with her knitting for a long time after he began to speak, and was far more intent on taking up a stitch she had dropped than on listening to what he was saying. My father drummed impatiently with two fingers of one hand on the back of the other, and looked as if he wished George had allowed him to have his favourite hour's reading before he began upon business. If it had not been for some pertinent questions of Hilary's and for Charlie's eagerness, I think they would have heard George's history to the end without perceiving that it concerned them. When the truth did dawn on my father at last, he fought long, almost angrily against believing it; questioning and cross-questioning, and disputing the accuracy of each one of George's statements. When George's clear answers had laid such proof before him as he could no longer withstand, he became silent. I heard him now and then draw a deep breath, saw him now and then move his hand across his forehead as if to remove a weight that oppressed him; then he leaned back in his chair, and his hands folded.

themselves together in the quiet attitude of patient waiting that had become habitual to him of late years. To him this change from poverty to wealth only presented itself under the form of a change of burdens, and his heart misgave him that he might find the new heavier and more difficult to carry than the old.

My mother naturally showed more excitement and emotion. She did not trouble herself to understand how the strange news could be true. Hilary believed it, and that was enough for her. She did not care for herself, she said—riches and great estates were nothing to her—but for Hilary—yes; she could not but triumph that Hilary should have his own at last. Had she not always upheld that he had rights which no one but herself acknowledged? Had she not always known that no one but Hilary *could* have a right to the lands her father had taught her to love so dearly?

When at last my father roused himself from his reverie, and my mother's volubility had subsided in a gentle flood of tears, George was able to draw my father and Hilary into grave consultation respecting the steps they should take to prepare Mr. Lester for our intended assertion of my mother's claim to

the Morfa estate. My father confessed he felt some scruple against asserting a claim which seemed to him merely legal and not just in itself, since Mr. Wynne, by mortgaging estates which he had no right to mortgage, had defrauded Mr. Lester as well as his daughter.

George said he should have shared my father's feelings if he had not, during his search among Morgan's papers, discovered evidence that Mr. Lester had, during many years, enriched himself at Mr. Wynne's expense. For many years he had evidently plotted to possess himself of the Morfa estate, and, to gain that end, he had practised the grossest deception on his weak minded brother-in-law. George could not regard the present discovery as anything but a just retribution on Mr. Lester for his treachery to his brother, and for his cruelty and hardness towards his orphan niece.

From this point the conversation grew intricate, and touched on matters I could not understand. After vainly trying to follow it for some time, I slipped away from the circle as Nesta had done before, and followed her to her room.

She had spoken little during the evening, and I found her walking up and down the room with an

unusual flush on her cheek and sparkle in her eye. She had been thinking, she told me eagerly, how this strange event would alter my future life, and George's. If we were to be rich, he must certainly share our prosperity. There need be no more waiting for us. He had chosen me when I was poor; with a proud heart I might now rejoice in being able to help him. I liked this thought, and, setting aside every other aspect under which we might have viewed the change, I dwelt upon every joyful circumstance suggested by this one.

In the midst of my happy chatter, Nesta suddenly dropped her head into her hands, and burst into a flood of tears. I was kneeling by her side in a minute, reproaching myself with my thoughtless selfishness. How could I have been so full of my own happiness! How could I have wounded her so! She looked up at last, with her own sweet reassuring smile. I had not wounded her—oh, no! It did not give her the least pain to plan my happy future. It was the one thing she liked to think of—the one thing that gave her peace. Only now and then a thought would come in about the others who were interested in what we had heard to-day.

"Yes," I said. "Oh, Nesta, if this had happened a year ago."

She put her hand over my mouth. "Hush, dear! don't say that. It is so near, it is almost wrong to wish that anything could have altered it, but, I cannot help wondering how they will feel. He will love her the better, Janet, I know he will. They will be drawn closer together by the loss. He will be so sorry for her, he will want to make her feel that he did not value her for her wealth. He will take her *quite* into his heart now. His ambition will be disappointed; so he will have to set all his care on her. She will be everything to him. I am glad—yes, I think I am *very* glad of it. How wicked it would be not to be glad enough! When to-morrow week is over, I shall be—surely I shall then be quite glad to think of his loving *her* above everything."



CHAPTER XX.

“ Stripped as I am of all the golden fruit
Of self-esteem ; and by the cutting blasts
Of self-reproach familiarly assailed ;
Yet would I not be of such wintry bareness
But that some leaf of your regard should hang
Upon my naked branches.”

WORDSWORTH.

THE next afternoon George determined to have an interview with Mr. Lester, and I was rather obstinately bent on walking with him to Morfa Mawr. My father, Charlie, and Hilary, had monopolized him the whole morning, and we had calmly submitted, having arranged to secure to ourselves a quiet hour in the afternoon. I was confident enough now of my own importance, to feel sure that George would get through his painful interview with Mr. Lester all the better for having first spent a happy hour with me. So I was, as I said before, a little obstinate about walking with him, though Hilary, who affected to be weatherwise, recommended my staying at home, and prophesied that we should have a

snow-storm before the evening closed in. I was not afraid of snow, I said, George and I had pleasant associations with snow-storms. Besides, I had promised Nesta to carry a basket of Christmas presents to a cottage at the foot of the Tan-y-Coed mountain, about half a mile beyond the hall. I should have time to go there and come back while George was with Mr. Lester. If the evening should close in before I rejoined him, it would not matter, as I should have his protection on the way home. Nesta was not in the room when Hilary made his remark about the coming storm. Before I started on my walk, I went to seek her in the store-room, to receive her last messages for the cottagers, and I found her in some trouble of mind. She had prepared some medicine for a sick child who lived in a lonely cottage half-way up the mountain. Hilary had promised to take it when he went out in the morning, but he had either forgotten it, or brought it back in his pocket, for there the bottle still was, as Nesta had just discovered, on the shelf of the store-closet. She feared it was almost too late to send it now, and yet she thought it important that her patient should have it before night. Unfortunately, Charlie and my father had set out on their afternoon walk, and Hilary had

started on his ride before Nesta discovered the omission. I thought it would be better that George should have to wait an hour or so for me at the hall, and that we should both be late for dinner, than that the sick child should want her medicine ; so with a little difficulty I persuaded Nesta to intrust it to me. I was, I urged, a very quick walker ; the distance was not great, and I might shorten it by taking a certain steep path up the mountain, which I thought I was now a sufficiently expert climber to venture upon.

It was a still, cloudy afternoon, not cold or foggy. The fields looked very green and fresh after the late heavy rains. The great trees of the Morfa woods lifted up their dark, wide-branching arms, distinct and moveless to the last slender twig, against the grey sky, now one even sheet of low-hanging clouds, except on the western side, where a streak of lurid red showed that the sun was already sloping towards the sea. The hill-sides spread themselves out with a peculiar distinctness field by field, so that I thought I could have counted the low stone walls that divided them. The distant mountains had buried their heads in the sky, except when now and then a chance ray of sunlight revealed the glimmering of a snow-crown. The afternoon had a sober

beauty of its own that charmed and soothed us. George, however, did not permit me to linger on the way. He was a little uneasy at the prospect of my mountain walk, and very anxious that I should run no risk of being benighted. I promised, when I left him at the Morfa Mawr gates, that I would turn back after leaving my basket at the nearest cottage, if it was late when I arrived there. The road was in a good state for walking, firm and hard, but not slippery. I made some adventurous short cuts, and was proud, on reaching the first cottage, to find that it still wanted twenty minutes to four o'clock. The cottagers were all out except one little girl, left in charge of the house, and a baby. I left my basket with her, and then held a moment's debate with myself as to whether I should venture to continue my mountain walk or not. I felt timid enough to wish heartily that there had been some one at the cottage I could ask to guide me. I knew I was not clever in finding my way, and in thinking over Nesta's directions I was not sure that I understood them clearly. On the other hand, it seemed a pity to turn back when I was so far on the way. The weather was clear, the air free from mist; indeed, I fancied that the clouds had risen and the light increased

since we started on our walk. I thought of the sick child's poor mother, who had now been for some hours anxiously expecting the promised medicine, and I resolved to take courage and venture on. If the worst came, and I found it too dark to return from the mountain cottage alone, I could but wait there till the sick child's father returned home, and make him guide me back to Morfa Mawr.

I fancy that having once admitted fear into my mind, I puzzled myself unnecessarily about the way, and grew over-cautious. I deliberated long at every point where a sheep-walk met the path I was following, and once or twice I returned and took a fresh road, when I fancied that the one I had first chosen was leading me in a wrong direction. I don't remember exactly how the feeling of utter bewilderment that afterwards took possession of me came on. I have read of a like sensation overtaking other wanderers. I only dimly recollect a long struggle against a growing conviction, that I was not nearing the end of the walk, that I had no reason for preferring one path to another, and finally, that every step I took up or down only led me further away from every known landmark. I must have been walking two hours before this feeling came upon me.



Sometimes I pressed on, saying to myself that the cottage must be near, and that, now the twilight had deepened into darkness, my best guide would be the light from the cottage window. Then my heart failed me. I went back a little way, and was frightened from continuing my descent by seeing how perilously steep and difficult the downward road looked, and how the gloom deepened when I faced the valley. Large flakes of snow had begun to descend about the time when I first perceived I had missed my way, but I did not heed them much. It was not till the air seemed to turn suddenly into a giddy whirl of fast falling flakes, and till I felt the ground slippery and cold under my feet, that I understood how much my peril was increased by the setting in of the storm Hilary had predicted. I was standing quite still when this thought came; it roused me to make a sudden despairing effort. A steep jagged path lay before me, leading straight up the mountain. If I could get to the top, I should at least have safe standing-ground, and command a wider extent of view. I might see a light in some cottage window, or succeed in making some one hear me. I don't know how I managed to gain the height. It was a much more perilous feat of climbing than I

ever attempted in broad daylight. I suppose the darkness partly concealed the dangers of the path. At all events, I did not think of it. I only felt I must struggle on, sometimes on hands and knees, but still straight on. When I gained the top, I was spent and breathless. My knees trembled under me. I was forced to throw myself down on the snowy ground. For a time—I don't know how long—I sat still, while my heart beat violently and my head swam from sheer exhaustion.

Then another fearful thought came, and I sprang to my feet and looked round. How dark—how terribly dark it had become! Night, as it seemed to me, had fallen at once—dark, still night. From above, the low-hanging clouds were emptying themselves on to the earth in a continual downfall of thick snow-flakes. Round me, as far as I could see, lay a bare, unknown tract of pathless mountain-side, just whitening with the falling snow. That was all I could see, strain my eyes as I would; but what was it I heard? A regular sound. My ear was awake to it before I was sufficiently collected to know what it was; then it told me how far I had wandered out of the way. It was the breaking of the tide against the rocks at the foot of Tan-y-Coed

Head. I had skirted the mountain, and come round to the sea side, where I knew it was most dangerous to stray. I thought with a shudder of histories Hilary had told me of sheep, and of shepherds too, who had wandered, as I had wandered, round the mountain late at night, and been found the next morning dashed to pieces at the foot of the rocks. I sat down again as these recollections rose up before me, spell-bound to the one level spot I had gained. I would not stir from it, I thought. Night might come, and the snow fall on and on, till I was buried in it, or frozen to death. I had rather have it so than risk that terrible giddy fall—down, down—which I had so often fancied, and the plunge into the dark sea at last. After a time a feeling of numbness and indifference crept over me. It did not seem so very bad to sit still and wait. I was less afraid of the darkness and silence than I had been a little time before.

I was dropping into a doze, in which I fancied myself safe at home again, when a sound roused me. I did not know what it was, or whence it came, but it brought me back to consciousness. I sprang to my feet, and shouted. No answer—not even an echo. Again and again I raised my voice. It seemed to be lost, scattered by the whirling snow.

Every time I called, I thought I made less impression on the thick, impenetrable air. The effort did me good, however. I was now quite awake, and sensible of the folly of yielding to drowsiness. I began to walk vigorously up and down the narrow space which I felt to be safe standing ground. After one or two turns I stopped and shouted again. There was a lull in the storm. I felt that my voice went further. I tried again. Was it the wind bringing me back my own powerless shout, or was it an answer? For some minutes I doubted. Then came a shrill sharp whistle and the bark of a dog, and at length through the snow flakes and the gloom I saw a figure coming towards me. It was a man wrapped in a plaid and followed by a dog. He had come close to me, and I had briefly explained my distress and asked his help before I perceived that it was Shafto Carr whose assistance I was claiming. A few hasty words of explanation followed our recognition of each other. He had started from Morfa Mawr early in the afternoon for a solitary ramble among the mountains. Like myself, he had been overtaken by the snow-storm, and had sheltered in a miner's hut not many yards from the spot to which I had climbed. He had been to the door of the hut to see

if there was any abatement in the storm when he heard my shout and came to my help. It was an inexpressible comfort to learn that there was shelter so near.

An old man carrying a horn lantern made his appearance as Mr. Carr finished speaking, and with his aid and Shafto's I managed to scramble down the hill side to the hut. I felt very weary again when the pressing need for exertion was over. I suppose I almost fainted, for I don't remember the first moments of my entrance into the cottage. When I came to myself, I was seated in a wooden arm-chair by the side of a peat fire. The old man was holding up my snowy cloak, which he had removed from my shoulders, and Mr. Carr was wrapping me carefully in his plaid. There was no one else in the hovel. As I afterwards learned, the old miner lived there alone, with no companion but the dog whose barking had roused me from my first dangerous sleep. It was some minutes before I could remember how I came to be in such a strange place, in such strange company. When the circumstances returned to my mind I still felt too weak and weary to think about them continuously. I sat still, idly amusing myself by wondering over the uses of the mining tools hanging on the wall, by looking into the red glow

of the peat fire, or by watching the miner's face and Mr. Carr's as they stood speaking in low tones together on the opposite side of the open hearth. When at length I was able to understand what they were saying, I found they were discussing the possibility of one or the other descending the mountain to Morfa, to let my friends know where I was. From time to time Mr. Carr went to the door to see if the storm were abating. Each time he returned I heard his report with increased interest and impatience, for as I recovered my energy, I began to picture to myself the terrible anxiety they must be enduring at home on my account, and to fancy all sorts of dangers which George and Hilary, or even my father, might at that moment be braving in search of me.

After a long interval, Mr. Carr returned from an excursion outside with the welcome news that the snow had almost ceased falling, and that the night, though cloudy, was not very dark. The miner then thought it possible that he might make his way down the mountain to Morfa, and volunteered to set off at once, leaving Mr. Carr in the hut to take care of me. Before leaving us he built up a good peat fire, and made me eat some oatcake and drink some warm

milk which he had prepared for me. When he had gone, I asked Mr. Carr what o'clock it was, and was surprised to hear that it was only eleven o'clock. It seemed to me days since I had left George at the gate of Morfa Mawr. To satisfy me, Mr. Carr tried to calculate how long it would be before our messenger could reach the farm, and as we discussed probabilities, we insensibly fell into friendly, intimate conversation together. "Would not they be anxious about him at Morfa Mawr?" I asked.

Perhaps. He thought so—a little. He had left Morfa soon after noon, intending to enjoy a long solitary ramble among the mountains. He had found himself in the way in the house. I knew him well enough not to be surprised to hear that. It was the old half good-humoured, half bitter smile which played over his face as he said this. How could I see it, reminding me as it did of other times and scenes, without being angry? Somehow or other the strange circumstances of our meeting had put my resentment aside. I could not help falling into the familiar tone that had marked our intercourse in former days. When he questioned me about those at home, I could not help answering fully and minutely. He would hear all about my father's loss

of sight, and Charlie's illness, and our coming to Morfa. He did not mention Nesta's name, or I think I should have drawn back ; but I remembered afterwards that all his questions had a tendency to bring out information about her. At last I seemed to have told him everything, the conversation flagged, and he remained for some time silent, resting his head on his hand, now and then rearranging something in the wood-fire, now and then turning his face towards me with a considering, approving look, which I hardly know how to describe, for I have never seen it on any face but his. At last he spoke again.

“Janet, it is a selfish thing to say, but this adventure of yours has turned out a great piece of good luck for me. To be hearing of you all again, to be talking familiarly with one of you, is greater happiness than I ever thought to have again. Sitting here in this strange place, seeing you as kind and sisterly as ever, hearing the dear names familiarly spoken—(yes, don't start up ! Why should I not say it?—the dear familiar names)—I can forget all that has happened, all that is going to happen, and live over again an hour from the best part of my life.”

“Not with my willing help,” I said. “Oh, Shafto ! how can you play with such a thought?

Don't speak it out to me. I can't patiently hear you regret a past from which you cut yourself off. Do have strength to choose one thing or another, and be firm in your choice. At all events, don't expect sympathy from me, if you regret what you have thrown away."

He bowed his head. "This is not a place or a time to quarrel in," he said, with a curious half-smile. "You have effectually dispelled my dream; but we won't quarrel. Can't you afford to be friends with me for half an hour?"

"I don't think I can," I said. "You have no right to expect me not to be angry with you."

"Have I not? Well, I thought that at the bottom of your heart you would be grateful to me. You have got your wish for your sister. You have secured the lot which you always thought would be the best and safest for her. And I have submitted very quietly—put myself out of her way and her recollection as soon as I understood clearly *that* was what you all expected of me, and what she wished. Perhaps you think I gave her up too easily. I might not have done so if I had believed myself to be worth more. I can understand your despising me. I expected that a little; but I think you should not be angry."

"Shafto," I said, "this is really too bad. You know that you only are to blame, and you are trying to make yourself believe that it is we who have wronged you."

"I do not say you were wrong. On the contrary, looking at it dispassionately—and I always try to look dispassionately even at what concerns myself—I think your father judged prudently, as most people count prudence. She was so young, so gentle-hearted, so timid. Her happiness was so infinitely precious. I have doubted my own power to make her happy; wayward and moody as I know myself to be, no wonder you doubted. What she felt for me was, I always knew, rather an imaginative fancy than a real feeling. When this failed, or at least when it proved not strong enough to withstand opposition and the wooing of a more prosperous lover, your father was right to interfere to break the last link and set her free."

"I don't understand you," I said, bewildered. "You speak as if Nesta had failed you; but it is you who tortured her by your unjust suspicions and cruel silence—it is you who have put an impassable barrier between yourself and her, by engaging yourself to another. You have been false to her, and now

you have not courage even to take the blame. You want to give us a new sorrow, by making us believe that we could have saved Nesta all she has suffered."

Anger, bewilderment, and a strange new fear overcame me as I finished speaking; a blinding rush of tears came to my eyes. While I was struggling with them, Mr. Carr walked across the hut to my side of the fireplace and stood over me. His voice, sounding hoarse and hard, overawed me into calmness again.

"Janet, I have not done what you said. It was not I who put the barrier between us. I had hardly left England before Nesta wearied of our engagement. You yourself confessed this to my mother, and gave her permission to write this opinion to me. The constrained, desponding tone of her own letters proved it to be true. Before I had been three months away, my mother noticed her preference for Richard Moorsom's society, and in the autumn of that year she was engaged to him. This at least is true, or why was Richard Moorsom here, staying with you? Why were they at church together that Sunday? I did not quite believe my mother's words till I saw them together."

"You ought never to have believed it," I said.

“ You ought to have trusted her ; you ought to have known her better. I can’t pity you even now, though I see you have been deceived. Nesta is not engaged to Mr. Moorsom ; she has never loved any one but you.”

I think I meant my words to stab him, but I would have recalled them the minute after they were spoken when I saw how sorry he was. He made no answer, but walked back to the other side of the fireplace and buried his face in his hands.

There was a long silence. I broke it first, for I really could bear it no longer.

“ Shafto,” I said, “ it is too late for explanations. You have been deceived, and I am sorry for you. But it will not do to talk about it now. You must fulfil your promise to Rosamond Lester, and, to do it rightly, the past must be buried and forgotten.”

He raised his head. The look of despair had left his face, and he spoke eagerly.

“ The past shall not be forgotten. It is not too late even now. Can you not be my friend, Janet? Can you not persuade her to forgive me? I can prove to her how grossly I was deceived. Perhaps I ought not to have believed anything that even my mother said against her, but many things combined

to confirm her words—Nesta's long silences, your father's angry letters, which proved, I thought, that he was seeking a pretext for breaking with me. I had some excuse for my credulity—I shall be able to show *her* that I had. Janet, say again what you said just now about Nesta's having never cared for any one but me. If you can say it deliberately and truly, say it again;—it will change my life. I do not presume to say that it will alter hers—she may choose never to forgive me—but it shall so far alter mine, that I will make it my aim to merit her forgiveness. I cannot ask any of you to trust me again now, but I may prove myself worthy of trust hereafter. Give me a motive to try."

I shook my head. In my weakness and weariness I could only make audible one word of my reply.

"Rosamond Lester."

Mr. Carr interrupted me, hastily. "I would tell her the whole truth. I should be covered with shame for my conduct to her. I shall all my life hate to think of it; but after what I have learned to-night, I can only do one thing—I can only tell her the whole truth, and trust to her generosity to forgive."

"A month ago you might have done so, but now you cannot, Shafto. I cannot explain why. You

will know to-morrow. To-morrow will make you feel that you cannot break your engagement with Rosamond Lester. Nesta could only despise you if you did."

"I must hear that from her own mouth, then! I must see her to-morrow."

"No, no! You were weak in letting any one persuade you to give her up. You would be wicked if, having already caused her so much suffering, you disturbed her peace again. You must not throw the weight of such a decision on her: you must make it alone. You ought to have some pity on her."

"You have none on me; but, Janet, I don't blame you. You cannot say anything of me that I shall not agree with. If I have indeed lost her by my own weakness and perversity, what word of bitterest blame can be strong enough? But if it is too late—if Nesta cannot forgive me, then you may be satisfied. I shall have a punishment great enough for even your estimate of my faults—a life-long punishment—a life-long regret and pain. Don't believe that outward prosperity or gratified ambition will relieve it, for they will not."

"I am sorry for you," I said. I wished I could have said more. I wished I could have told him

how Nesta had conquered regret and pain, but my voice failed me.

Mr. Carr turned from me and began to pace the narrow hut. After a time he came to me again.

"I hear steps and voices approaching," he said. "Before this opportunity ends, make me one promise. Tell her all. Don't let her think me worse than I am. Let her know at least that I have always loved, always regretted her."

"Will it be well for her to know this?" I asked. "Cannot you be unselfish enough to think of her peace first?"

"It will be well. I am judging her by myself, her sorrow by what mine has been. I know that it is moral death to have to think meanly of what one loves. You have restored her to me to-night; restore me to her as far as you can. Don't let her think me altogether base. That will be best for her and me. Promise."

"I will tell her all you have said," I answered; "but, remember, how she will think of you depends more on what you do for the future than on what I tell her."

I had no time to say more. I heard the sound of approaching steps and voices, and the next moment

the door opened, and the little hut seemed full of friendly faces. George and Hilary were both there. Our host had met them at the foot of the mountain, just as they were preparing to ascend. Several of the farm-labourers and cottagers from Morfa Bach accompanied Hilary, and I heard that other bands of searchers were out on the mountain looking for me. I should have been ashamed of causing so much trouble by my own stupidity, if every other feeling had not been swallowed up in gratitude at seeing the joy my safety seemed to give them all. After some consultation it was settled that I must not attempt to walk down the mountain. A sort of palanquin was improvised with the miner's arm-chair and sundry shawls and blankets which Nesta had made the seeking-party take with them. In this I was placed, well wrapped up from the cold. It was more nervous work, sitting in it and submitting to be carried, than wading through the snow on my own feet would have been—at least I thought so; but I was too grateful not to let them do as they liked with me.

My palanquin had many relays of willing bearers; but our descent of the mountain occupied some hours. We did not reach Morfa Bach farm till the first streak of wintry dawn was breaking in the sky.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ Was never Payne but it had joye at last
In the fayre morrow.”

Pastyme of Pleasure.

My mother and Nesta were so convinced that I must be half dead with fatigue and cold, that they would hardly let me give an account of my adventures before they hurried me to bed. On my account the house was kept hushed and quiet the whole day. Every now and then my mother or Nesta stole on tip-toe to look at me, and retreated again when I showed a disposition to wake up and begin talking to them. I was weary enough to be glad of the perfect rest, and yet I only slept for short intervals, starting up always from night-mare dreams of falling down precipices, with a painful conviction that something was happening in the house, and that I ought not to be where I was. The first glance round my own

peaceful room reassured me, but always when I had lain still for a few minutes watching the pale flames of the fire struggling against the rays of wintry sunlight that streamed through the curtains of my window, the feeling of expectation returned, and I sat up and listened anxiously, to try if I could not, through the quiet, catch some sound that would justify my uneasiness. Now and then my ear caught some token of ordinary household occupation that made me smile at my fears—Mrs. Morgan's creaking footsteps on the back stairs, my father's voice speaking low to Charlie as they returned together from their morning walk. Oftenest, the perfect stillness was only broken by a faint sound which must have been in my ears, for I could not really have heard it. I fancied I heard a bell tolling a very long way off in the air. I could not always hear it, but, when I did, it seemed to come at regular intervals, solemnly and slowly. I knew that we were too far off from any church to hear a bell, even if one were tolling, so I tried to put the notion out of my mind, and to sleep again.

Towards afternoon I did fall into a long, refreshing slumber, and when I awoke I found the sunbeams all gone out of my room, the fire burning bright, and Nesta standing by my bed-side with the news that I

had slept for three hours, that George had been asking impatiently for me many times, and that I might now, if I liked, be permitted to rise.

I did not avail myself of the permission immediately. I made Nesta get on the bed, draw the curtains round, and rest her head on my pillow; and then I told her of my meeting with Shafto, and of all he had said to me. She did not interrupt me with any exclamations of wonder or interest, and as I could not see her face, I did not know how she was affected by my words. I only heard a little gasping sigh of impatience if I paused for an instant. When I had finished she asked me a question or two—how he had looked, if I were sure he had got down the mountain safely, if we had parted good friends. Then she begged me to repeat a sentence she had not understood clearly. She was very particular about the words, very much surprised if I hesitated or seemed doubtful about one, very much afraid of losing one; but when she was convinced that I had taxed my memory to the utmost, and paid over to her every syllable I held in trust, as scrupulously as if it had been a piece of gold, she seemed indisposed to carry the conversation further. I had begun already to conjecture

about the future, to hope that my chance-meeting with Shafto might change his and Nesta's fate; but she would not let me speak of these hopes. It was not, she said, a day to be making plans for the future. She did not want to go a step beyond what I had told her. She was not sure it would be right to think even of that to-day. The gravity of her tone surprised me. Could it really be that the very thought of the danger I had incurred had cast such a deep shadow over her that she could not throw it off, even when she had me safe at home?

When I came down stairs I noticed the same subdued gravity about every one. The octagon parlour looked the picture of comfort and peace; I was disposed to be very happy when I found myself resting on the sofa, with George sitting by me, and the recollection of the previous night's peril to heighten my sense of safety. The different members of the household, down to Morgan Owen, came in one by one to look at me and hear from my own lips that I was safe and well. It was pleasant to be made so much of, and yet every one looked so grave that I dare not give myself leave to be as merry as I wanted to be. When at last George and I were alone together, I told him about my fancy,

that I had heard a bell tolling all the morning, and I confessed to him that it had made me uncomfortable, and that I wished I could get the sound out of my ears.

He did not laugh at me as I had expected. "I have heard of such things before," he said, reflectively. " Sounds are carried very far on still days like this, when the ground is covered with snow and the wind is favourable."

"Then the church bells have been tolling all to-day?" I asked.

"I dare say the bells of Morfa church have tolled; Mr. Lester died at four o'clock this morning. No, lie down again. Don't look so shocked, dear; it was not after seeing me. The seizure came just twelve hours before he died. When I called yesterday evening he was too ill to see me. He has died without knowing what would have embittered his last day. Morfa has passed from him without intervention of ours."

"I am glad."

"So am I; and yet we said last night that the loss of Morfa would be a just punishment for the poor man's dishonesty and greed. Ought we to be glad that he has not lived to bear it here?"

"I don't know. But for Rosamond's sake let us be

glad; it would have been terrible for her if her grandfather's death had been hastened by hearing this news. She will bear it very calmly for herself; I believe she will even rejoice. If she wishes to free herself from her engagement with Mr. Carr, the change in her circumstances gives her a reason for doing so, and Lady Helen will give her every help. What haste she will be in to show her that she does not want a penniless daughter-in-law!"

"Poor Miss Lester! I am afraid she has a trying time to pass through. However little she may care for these people, it will surely be a bitter mortification to be rejected by them the instant she ceases to be heiress of Morfa."

"Shafto will not reject her on that account. I am only afraid of his spoiling all by insisting too earnestly on keeping his promise to her. He will do it all the more fiercely because he does not love her. What a difficult part Lady Helen will have to play between them! I wonder if she will have sense and courage to tell the exact truth to each, after all her previous misrepresentations, and make them see how little love there has ever been in their engagement. It is the only way, but I fear it is too straightforward for her to take."

“ She will have plenty of time to consider her plans. The marriage must be put off now for six months at least, on account of Mr. Lester’s death, and before those six months are over they will surely have discovered each other’s real wishes.”

“ I hope so. When that engagement is once broken, there will be no more mortification for Rosamond.”

“ How so? I should fear that many more mortifications must follow such a sudden fall from great wealth to poverty.”

“ I must not tell other people’s secrets, but do you remember Tennyson’s story of Lady Clare? I shall make Hilary read it after tea. I wish the time were come for his saying the two last lines in earnest—

“ For we will wed to-morrow morn,
And you shall still be Lady Clare.”

“ It is a long way off yet, I can tell you. You speak as if titles could be proved and estates change hands in a night. There is a great deal of work to be done, and some anxiety to bear. One never knows how things will go.”

“ What are you going to do first?”

“ Nothing just at present. I shall wait till I return to London, learn who are Rosamond’s guardians, and speak first to them. Of course they will

make a hard fight to keep the estate for her, and they command money to fight with, and we have none."

"But we have right on our side, and you to make the right clear. Oh, you will not succeed in making me anxious."

"No; I shall be the only anxious person—I shall have all the work to do. You good people will trust blindly to me, and not trouble yourselves in the least."

"Well, you have two or three days' respite while you stay here; let us make the most of them.

I was glad at first to be able to put aside for a time the thought of coming change; but a very few days after Mr. Lester's funeral was over, I began to wish that some hint of George's discovery might find its way to Lady Helen's ears. The manner in which she monopolized Rosamond, and made herself mistress of Morfa, rather alarmed me. She believed herself to have already clutched the prize she had so long coveted, and she could not quite conceal her triumph. I don't think she was uneasy at the postponement of the marriage. She had too much confidence in Rosamond's honour to fear that she would withdraw a promise once given. And perhaps, too, in the first moments of bereavement, Rosamond, feeling herself utterly alone in the world, did turn

with a yearning for affection to those who were so soon to claim her as their own. Certainly during the few times when I saw Rosamond, Lady Helen, and Shafto together, their manner to each other troubled me. The compassionate sympathy with which Shafto regarded Rosamond in her grief might well be taken for love, and Lady Helen was charmingly, happily affectionate to them both. I could hardly keep myself from believing that she was the fond, devoted mother she appeared to be. Happiness did for the time, I suppose, make her amiable.

I did not absent myself from the Hall, as I had formerly done. I took every opportunity of being with Rosamond Lester, and used every affectionate wile I could think of to draw her once more under our influence. I had no scruple about doing this now; I wanted her to feel that she had some friends to whom she might turn when the storm burst over her.

My assiduity gained me one object on which my heart was set. When Lady Helen and Mr. Carr returned to London, I succeeded in persuading Rosamond to remain behind with Mrs. Western at Morfa. Lady Helen had planned that Rosamond was to live with her till her marriage, and she was

much disappointed and very angry when Rosamond roused herself sufficiently to have a wish that did not accord with her arrangements. It was not till the day for the journey was determined upon, that Rosamond found courage to declare her intention of staying at home. Till the very last moment, Lady Helen hoped to carry her off, out of the dangerous region of my influence, and I must confess I rather enjoyed timing my daily visit to Morfa so as to see her drive off discomfited and alone.

A week after, Lady Helen was no doubt very thankful to me for having relieved her of an embarrassing companion. The news that George Armstrong had brought forward a claim on my mother's behalf to the Morfa estate, must have come upon her like a thunder-clap. I never knew till long afterwards how she bore it. While the cause was pending, she wrote regularly to Rosamond, chatty pleasant letters, such as one acquaintance might write to another, full of public news and gossip about common friends; but not containing a word of allusion to any personal interest. There might as well have been no law-suit going on in which Rosamond's whole fortune was involved, no marriage in prospect between her and Shafto, for any mention Lady Helen

made of either. Rosamond used to show these letters to me with a puzzled look. They amused me; they were so exactly what, under the circumstances, I should have expected Lady Helen to write.

As Lady Helen's letters grew colder, Mr. Carr's increased in warmth. Sometimes Rosamond would read to me a sentence or two from one of them. They contained no exaggerated expressions of affection, no words which I could say to myself must be untrue. He was earnest only in insisting, that the change of Rosamond's circumstances must not and should not affect the promise that had passed between them. To me, the reiterated words, dwelling always on that one point, were those of a man who knew himself to be insisting on his own doom, and was yet determined to leave no word unsaid that could make it more certain. His pleadings were hearty enough; they were respectful, sympathizing, even tender sometimes; but I felt that they were not those which a lover would have used to urge such a suit.

One day, about a week after the news that we had gained our cause came down to Morfa, Rosamond asked me in direct words, "Do you think he loves me?" I answered by giving her an account of Nesta's acquaintance with Mr. Carr, from the first

day of his meeting her at Broadlands to their final parting. I told her just the facts, and let her judge of them for herself. It grieved me to see how much she was surprised and pained by my history. Believing she had no other firm friend in the world, she had begun to trust to Mr. Carr, and to cling to the thought of his affection for her. It wounded her deeply to learn that he had wooed her from pique and disappointment, not even from kindness. Life seemed very hard to her just then. She said she had no friend anywhere whom she could trust; no one, it seemed, had ever really loved her or dealt openly with her. She was disposed at first to be angry with me for having concealed from her Mr. Carr's conduct to Nesta. She complained that we had stood by—we who thought ourselves so open and true—and let her be deceived. I was sorry for all this pain, but I knew I had only given a bitter medicine, for which she would thank me by-and-by. She wrote to Mr. Carr after seeing me, and the next day he came down to Morfa. I believe he honestly did all he could to persuade her to keep to her engagement, but she remained firm in her determination to end it. I did not see him while he stayed at Morfa, nor her after they had parted. I

was surprised by receiving a farewell letter from her, two days after Mr. Carr's return to London. In it she told me that she and Mrs. Western had resolved to leave Morfa as speedily and quietly as possible. They had arranged to start the next morning for Edinburgh, where they expected to stay some months with a sister of Mrs. Western's, who had kindly invited them to make her house their home, till some plan for Rosamond's future life could be determined upon. At the conclusion of the letter Rosamond hoped we should not be hurt at her leaving without seeing us. She avoided us from no feeling of ill-will, but because she shrank from parting scenes. She hoped we should be happier at Morfa than she had been, and she begged us not to be uneasy about her. She was glad to be free, and to see a straightforward, if cloudy life, before her. She and Mr. Carr had parted friends, and some day she hoped to speak a word for him to Nesta.

I showed this letter to Hilary, and it was all I could do to dissuade him from following her at once to Edinburgh. It was only by assuring him continually that Rosamond was not a person to accept one lover the week after she had discarded another, that I could induce him to be patient for a little

while. I wrote often to Rosamond, but did not receive answers to my letters. George corresponded with her guardians and with Mrs. Western, and every now and then there came a few lines from her, to acknowledge the considerate kindness which my father and mother showed in every arrangement where her interests were concerned.

She accepted the liberal provision which my father assigned to her from the estate, because she would not pain him by refusing it; but I gathered from the words of her letter, that it would better have suited her present mood if she had been thrown entirely upon her own resources, and had to do battle against the world unaided. She could not bear to be pitied, and just then she would receive every kindness as a mark of pity instead of love.

I could not make Hilary understand how unfavourable this state of mind was to his wishes. He would go to Edinburgh before I gave him leave, and he came back crosser and more unhappy than he had ever been in his life. It was long before I could get the particulars of his visit from him, or learn more than that he had been decidedly and angrily refused. When I did hear all that he had said, and all Rosamond had answered, I felt less hopeless than

he insisted on being. I saw exactly how he had ruined his own cause. In telling Rosamond of his love, he had also let her know that he would never have asked her to be his wife if she had continued heiress of Morfa; and she had chosen to believe that his asking her now, in her fallen fortunes, was a fresh instance of the insulting pity she was so anxious to put from her.

I do not believe the tangle would ever have been put right if my father had not suddenly taken into his head to start off with my mother on a visit to his old friend Dr. Allison. He did not say a word about seeing Rosamond, but he had not been a day in Edinburgh before he sought her out; and, after that, my mother's letters never failed to contain some mention of her. She and my father had gone out to walk—or they had been sitting for a whole hour talking in Dr. Allison's garden—or Rosamond was reading Dante to him. She had such a pretty accent, and read Italian better, our father said, than I did.

I was not jealous, but I was much amused. Certainly, in old times, the idea of our father concerning himself to bring two lovers to a right understanding, would have appeared to us very incongruous.

They stayed a month with Dr. Allison, and then my father wrote to Hilary to come and bring them home again. He went. Nesta and I had to keep house at Morfa alone for a fortnight, and when they came back it was a radiantly happy party we had to receive: Hilary was engaged to Rosamond, and the marriage was fixed for the autumn. I did not see it, nor the happy return to Morfa Mawr of its old mistress under a new name. My own day had come before that—a sunny, showery July day, which George said had just the mixture of cloud and shine which we might reasonably expect in our lives. We have had fewer showers, however, so far, than the day had.

When Hilary was married I was abroad with George, making the most of his autumn holiday, for his first tour in Switzerland.

Hindrances of one kind and another prevented our going down to Morfa for nearly a year after we were married, so that the new ways of living, the new occupations and relationships, had become old to every other member of the family before I saw much of them.

The Great House never looked quite home-like to me, and I don't believe it ever did to my father and

mother. They tried it for a year, but my mother never left off lamenting the old manor-house, which Mr. Lester had wickedly pulled down, and my father could not find anywhere a den small enough for him to walk up and down in. Also, my mother's notions of housekeeping and Rosamond's did not quite coincide. My mother was afraid of the Morfa Mawr servants, and had no peace in her life because of their extravagant ways; whereas Rosamond, in spite of past tirades against luxury, proved to have a lurking love of magnificence in her, which disposed her to believe that the credit of Hilary's family was concerned in maintaining the state of the Great House unimpaired. When they had lived together for a year, it was decided that my father and mother should give up Morfa Mawr to Hilary and Rosamond and return to Morfa Bach, which Hilary had improved into a very pretty country-house, not so unlike the old manor but that my mother could be happy in it. The octagon room was lined from ceiling to floor with book-shelves, and my father again paced up and down between the windows, and he and my mother wandered about the Morfa Bach woods as happily and unconstrainedly as they had done before our change of fortune.

But though my father abandoned Morfa Mawr, he by no means abdicated to Hilary his position of master of the Morfa estate. Power of any kind came to my father accompanied with too deep a sense of responsibility for him to put it aside. He was as much the head of his tenants and work people as he had been of the school and of his family, and he knew them all in the same marvellous way in which he had known us. Hilary used to say that my father was not quite at ease, if there was an old woman on the estate who complained that her cottage chimney smoked, till he had thought of some way of curing it; and as he listened to every complaint, and never would believe but that every ill might be remedied, the people of Morfa had busy times under my father's rule. With Nesta, or Rosamond, or my mother, he visited, at regular intervals, every farm-house, shepherd's cottage, or miner's hut that came within his jurisdiction, and knew the people who lived in them, and was made the confidant of all their joys and cares.

They came to have a superstitious feeling about the blind gentleman's knowledge of them. They could not believe that it came to him in an ordinary way, and many, of the most ignorant among them, were

first awakened to a sense of responsibility by a conviction that they were somehow or other never out of the ken of those sightless eyes, which awed them by their fixed, mild gaze ; while my father's words impressed them with a belief that he understood better than they did themselves what was passing in their minds.

I think my father's life was far more altered by our change of fortune than was our mother's. In reality it made very little difference to her ; her cares, her fears, her occupations, her pleasures, were neither increased nor diminished by the attainment of what she had perhaps often coveted. My father would, in thought, have shrunk from the position in which he was now placed, and yet it fitted him, and called out powers in him which had never yet been fully exercised. He had more care, but his life was fuller, richer than it had been before.

Nesta divided her time pretty equally between the two Morfas. She and Rosamond were fast friends. Rosamond kept up an occasional correspondence with the Carrs, and I fancy that she and Nesta had a good deal of talk over the letters that came and went. Rosamond was always more of an advocate for Mr. Carr than I could prevail on

myself to be. She had known him under circumstances favourable for bringing out the good in his character; she always felt kindly towards him, and, now that she was quite happy herself, generously excused his conduct to her. For that, Nesta loved her, and clung to her. I had had one letter from Mr. Carr to congratulate me on my marriage. In it, he said, that he refrained from sending any message to Nesta because he could not expect her to forgive him, or trust him again, without a long probation. If he had been able to resign Rosamond while she was still heiress of Morfa, he should at least have given us a proof of his sincerity: as it was, he stood in the position of one who had been rejected, and he had no right to hope that Nesta would listen to him till time had proved the reality of his attachment. I sent a kind answer to this letter, and then our correspondence ceased, and I heard of him and of Lady Helen only now and then from Rosamond. They lived for some years abroad. Lady Helen had a very serious illness one winter, and after that she remained for some years in very feeble health. Her son resided with her in a retired village in the south of Italy, where Lady Helen spent her time watching her own health, and her son studied and wrote. Every

now and then a book of his found its way to Morfa. The first that came remained for a week uncut on the drawing-room table ; no one looking at it but Nesta, who had not courage to take possession of it and carry it to her own room, and who only ventured to peep between the pages when no one was near. At last it chanced that Rosamond's eye fell upon a passage which she thought would please my father. She put the volume in her pocket, carried it down to Morfa Bach, and read portions of it aloud one evening, without telling my father who was the author. His determination not to admire modern poetry kept him silent for a long time, and prompted him to find fault whenever he could. This was an odd expression, and that simile was surely strained. But the reader was kept to her work. My father would have one stanza and then another read again. At last he was fairly conquered, and got up and walked rapidly up and down the room—the greatest tribute my father ever paid to the excellence of a book. When Rosamond described to me how Nesta looked during this walk, I wished I had been there to see. Charlie's old hero-worship of Mr. Carr returned stronger than ever ; and after that day the arrival of a book of his was the greatest of events at Morfa.

Nesta had some difficulty in establishing her right to these books, though they were always very distinctly sent to her; and if she had confessed the thought of her heart, she would have said that she had another right, that of understanding some passages in them better than any one else could.

It was not till I had been married several years that I saw Shafto Carr again. He walked quietly into my sitting-room one very busy morning, when some domestic commotion was going on, and my little people were not behaving themselves in as orderly a manner as usual. He volunteered to stay and help me through the morning lessons, and made himself so much at home in my house that, during the few weeks he stayed in London, he was seldom to be found anywhere else. We got a good deal of envy from our acquaintance on account of our monopoly of a person whom every one was wanting to see; and we could not confess that it was not entirely esteem and affection for us that made him prefer spending his mornings in play with my little girls, and his evenings in quiet talk with George, to frequenting the society of those who were vieing with each other how to make much of him. We grew very fond of him while he stayed with us. When

we were alone we used to say to each other how much we thought him improved, and when next we were in his company we were almost ashamed of having used a word which sounded as if we thought ourselves his superiors. Yet he had improved, and in a way of which we were capable of judging. He had grown up since we last saw him; he had left off playing with serious things, and was now in earnest in his search for truth. He was one to be always seeking. The change was, that he now sought reverently and earnestly, in the childlike, humble spirit that alone can find. In the light that had come to him, the faults that had deformed his character—the discontent, the weariness, the morbid self-inspection—had vanished away. I used to tell him that, though he was more of a man, he was also more of a child than he had been eight years before. I should not have been afraid of setting him and my father to talk on any subject now. There would be no occasion now to watch their words tremblingly.

He was detained in London by business for some time. As soon as he was free, he went down to Morfa, and spent the rest of the summer between the three houses (for Charlie had a church and parsonage at Tan-y-Coed by that time). He was very welcome

at each of the three; but it was not till late in the autumn that he found courage to ask Nesta to renew her old promise to him. I believe Lady Helen was the person who rejoiced most thoroughly on hearing of their engagement. We all dreaded too much the prospect of losing Nesta to do more than consent uncomplainingly. Lady Helen made up for past coldness by overwhelming cordiality now. She had long been very lonely, very wretched; she had become very helpless, and she certainly showed great knowledge of character when she threw herself upon Nesta's sympathy, and claimed her love and duty as unreservedly as if she had never injured her.

Nor do I think that she found the kindnesses with which Nesta soothed the last years of her life "coals of fire." She only wondered that some people should be so different from others, and congratulated herself that, after all, things had turned out better for her than at one time she had expected. She seemed to think there was a virtuous resignation in her saying this, as if she paid a compliment to Providence by acknowledging that, after all, His plans had proved better than her own. It was strange, I used to observe to George sometimes, that a person of so much intellect as Lady Helen

should be able to look at the events of life in such a poor, personal spirit only. He was not surprised. She had all her life, he said, been planning and scheming for herself, and intellect and heart had narrowed, till the interests of self were alone visible, and the universe seemed to turn round that poor centre. She could only gain from Nesta the good of being more at ease when near her. She could not be raised by her example to any higher standing-ground—so I think, at least; but Nesta will not believe but that some of the love and gratitude which Lady Helen professes to feel, is disinterested and genuine. What a contrast there is between my mother and Lady Helen in their old age!—the one becoming yearly more burdened with petty cares, more anxious about small comforts and pleasures, less able to abstract her thoughts a moment from her own infirmities and losses; the other growing always tenderer, larger-hearted, freer from self, as the time for losing self altogether draws near, wiser with the sublime heart-wisdom which comes of loving much. Yet Lady Helen, not without reason, considered our mother a childish, weak character, no fit companion for herself, when they began life together.

I have said that I never found Morfa Mawr as

home-like as either of my old homes, and yet, now I think of the aspect it has worn during one or two of our late autumn visits, I am disposed to retract the saying. It is not at all too large for the number of children it has to take in at our great family gatherings, and when Nesta and I, with our children, are visiting there, my father and mother leave Morfa Bach to Mrs. Morgan, and contrive to reconcile themselves to the Great House. I do not think it casts a shadow over any one now. I amuse myself when we are all together by observing how anxious we are, each of us, to believe our children free from the faults through which we have suffered, and endowed with the perfections which we know are wanting in ourselves. I am proud when my mother praises my little daughters' sewing, and declares that they are all more notable than their mother was at the same age. Shafto and Nesta delude themselves with the idea that their only son is as hardy and adventurous as Hilary's boys, and do not like to hear of his having kept the whole party of children idle an entire morning on the beach, listening breathlessly to a fairy tale, when they were supposed to be out boating. Hilary and Rosamond, on the other hand, are somewhat disappointed that, among all their

children, only one shows any disposition to inherit our father's love of books. They never over-valued intellect in grown-up people, but on this one clever but sickly child they lavish so much pride and love, that we sensible bystanders tremble to see it. "My father over again," Hilary says, triumphantly, whenever he notices that the delicate little fellow, unable to cope with his strong, rough brothers and sisters, has crept away to read in peace in some sunny nook of the garden.

We used at one time to fear that Rosamond and Hilary were growing a little over-full of the cares and business of life, becoming so cumbered with 'many things,' that they were in danger of losing the reality of happiness in the parade of outward circumstance which great wealth brings. It is not so now. The constant trembling fear, with which they watch over this child's frail life, seems to have made mere worldly interests sink again into their due proportions. Charlie has the new church, built and endowed by my father for the miners at Tan-y-Coed. The old farm-house has been turned into a perfect parsonage. He and my father work very happily together among his parishioners, though there are points of Church-discipline on which

they are not agreed. Charlie is perhaps a little opinionative still, and his old hatred of authority has changed into a very high opinion of priestly dignity, and an excessive straitness about rules and observances which my father thinks somewhat unwise. We have very hot arguments when George and Shafto, Charlie, my father and I, fall into discourse together over a new book, or a sermon, on Sunday evenings. I sometimes think that it is because Shafto has courage to make us go deeper, and take wider views of the subject in discussion than we should do without his leading, that these talks most usually end by our finding, that though we have none of us conceded anything, we are nearer in thought than we believed ourselves to be when the argument began.

My father usually leaves the church-services to Charlie, having a needless distrust of his own little-exercised powers of preaching; but sometimes he gives us a sermon, and if it is known beforehand, the villagers come for miles round to the little Tan-y-Coed church to hear the blind gentleman preach. The last time I heard him was one September afternoon, after the harvest-thanksgiving service, and the congregation was so large that we had to abandon all pretence of gathering inside the building, and

adjourn to the churchyard on the sloping hill-side. The door of the church was open, and Charlie read the service from the desk duly, his fine voice being clearly audible outside ; but my father came and stood to preach by the one mound that had yet broken the smooth green surface, destined in a few years to be furrowed with graves. It was a very still day, and we could hear, far below us, the high tide lapping against the steep sides of Tan-y-Coed Head. Now and then a sea-gull's or cormorant's cry rose shrill ; now and then the distant bleating of sheep from the opposite side of the hill mixed pleasantly with the sea music.

My father stood silent for a moment or two after Charlie had led him to his place, listening to these sounds. Then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he gave out his text. I knew it was not the one he had intended to speak about. "The earth is the Lord's," he said, in a tone of solemn triumph and satisfaction. "The earth is the Lord's!" He dwelt on the words ; they were to him a song of joy, which he could not repeat too often on this perfect day, when the wealth of the year had been safely gathered, and the labours of the year brought to a successful close. He warned the people against

fancying that any part of this earth was more one person's than another's ; and he besought them never to forget, in their transactions with him, and with each other, that the fertile fields and rich valleys and sheltering hills of Morfa were a Divine possession, which it was sacrilege for any one human owner to arrogate to himself.

A share of its treasures the true Owner would give to each, in such proportion as pleased Him. Of its best enjoyments we could not mete out each other's shares. Then he referred to his own blindness, and made the people understand how Morfa belonged to every one of them who had eyes to see its beauty, more than to him. Yet he did not complain of his privation, for he told them there was an inward accordance with the mind of the Creator which brought the tranquillity and joy of nature more intimately into the soul than mere outward vision could do. To be at one in will with the Giver was truly to possess all things. Rich or poor, wise or simple, the earth was theirs—all things were theirs, with whom was the secret of the Lord !



